

WHEN ATTENTION BECOMES CONTROL

A Guide to Recognizing Red Flags
in Relationships

Love should never require you to give up your freedom, friendships, privacy, boundaries — or yourself.

Coercive control is a pattern of pressure, monitoring, isolation, or threats that limits your freedom and makes saying no feel unsafe.

Control can look like attention, protection, concern, or someone who “really loves you.”

**Healthy relationships build you up.
They don't make you smaller.**



THE QUESTION TO KEEP ASKING:

*Do I feel free to
be myself?*

Free to say no.

Free to disagree.

Free to have friends.

Free to make plans without them.

Free to have privacy.

Free to change my mind.

You can love someone and still deserve
privacy, boundaries, friendships, and a voice.

KNOW THE RED FLAGS

When attention starts becoming control.

Control doesn't always announce itself. Sometimes it looks like concern, jealousy, constant communication, or wanting to be together all the time.

Look for patterns — not just one bad moment.

01

DIGITAL CONTROL

- Demands immediate replies or constant location sharing.
- Insists on passwords or checks your messages.
- Gets angry when you go offline or turn off your location.

02

ISOLATION + JEALOUSY

- Makes time with friends or family cause conflict.
- Accuses you of cheating or demands proof of where you are.
- Treats possessiveness as love and pressures you to pull away from others.

03

PRESSURE + PUNISHMENT

- Uses guilt, anger, or withdrawn affection to get compliance.
- Pressures you for sex or intimate images.
- Threatens consequences when you say no.

04

FEAR + INTIMIDATION

- Breaks things, blocks exits, or uses physical intimidation.
- Threatens to expose private information or images.
- Threatens harm to you or themselves to stop you from leaving.

DON'T IGNORE THE PATTERN.

*Control often disguises
itself as care in the beginning.*

“Control often
shows up as care
in the beginning.”



WATCH WHAT HAPPENS TO YOU

Sometimes the clearest warning sign isn't what they do. It's who you're becoming around them.

HAVE YOU STARTED...

- ☐ Checking your phone because you're afraid to miss a message?
- ☐ Changing clothes or plans to avoid their reaction?
- ☐ Seeing friends or family less to avoid an argument?
- ☐ Explaining normal decisions or apologizing to keep the peace?
- ☐ Keeping things from people you trust?
- ☐ Feeling responsible for keeping them calm or happy?
- ☐ Feeling afraid of what they might do if you say no or leave?



PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT'S
GETTING SMALLER.

Your world.
Your relationships.
Your independence.
Your confidence.
Your voice.

You should not have to manage
someone else's reactions to feel
safe in your relationship.

You don't need to be certain it's abuse to talk to someone.

LET'S TALK ABOUT IT

Sometimes you know something feels off long before you know how to explain it. These questions can help you talk it through with someone you trust—or simply get honest with yourself.



01 | START WITH YOURSELF

- ☐ Do I feel free to say no?
- ☐ Can I disagree without fearing their reaction?
- ☐ Do I feel like myself in this relationship?
- ☐ Have I changed parts of myself just to keep the peace?
- ☐ Am I making choices based on what I want—or how they'll react?

02 | TALK TO SOMEONE YOU TRUST

- ☐ "I'm not sure anything is 'wrong,' but something doesn't feel right."
- ☐ "I've noticed I'm changing how I act because I'm worried about their reaction."
- ☐ "Can I tell you what's been happening without you trying to fix it yet?"
- ☐ "I need another perspective. Does this sound healthy to you?"
- ☐ "I think I've been making decisions for peace instead of acting like myself."

03 | IF YOU'RE TALKING TO SOMEONE YOU'RE WORRIED ABOUT

- ☐ "I've noticed you don't seem quite like yourself lately. How are you doing?"
- ☐ "Do you feel like you can say no or disagree in your relationship?"
- ☐ "What happens when you make plans without them?"
- ☐ "Do you ever feel like you have to manage their reactions?"
- ☐ "You don't have to tell me everything—you can come to me with whatever you're ready to share. I just want you to know I'm here."

SOMETIMES THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU CAN SAY IS:

"You can tell me the messy parts."

No judgment. No pressure. You don't have to have it figured out first.

NEED SUPPORT?

FAITH-BASED SUPPORT

FOCUS Ministries | focusministries1.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline

800-799-SAFE (7233) | Text START to 88788

If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

Use a safer device if your phone or accounts may be monitored.