

Letting Go of Your CONTROL ISSUES

We love being in control, especially the power and feeling of being better than others! Do you know what I mean? Of course you do! You've felt it with colleagues or your spouse. Control feels good! But it doesn't feel good to those you control. To them, it feels like domination and disrespect.

The need to be in control starts very early in life. Authority figures usually act out of love, but in some cases, they mimic controlling behavior that they experienced as children. Children are told, "Do it because I said so" or "Do what you're told, or else." Instead of learning that parents control out of love, children learn that they control to meet their own needs.

Another cause of controlling behavior is the lack of an authority figure, which creates a need to become a strong, in-control person. Later in life, we may not want to give up control, so we attempt to stay in control by never submitting to anyone else.

Controlling behavior is any attempt to manipulate others' behavior, control your environment, insist on your way, or act defensive or anxious when others don't behave as you think they should. A controlling person fixates on others' actions and how they affect him or her. Controllers often obsess over minor issues such as the color of paper clips used in the office.

A controller cannot allow others to be themselves or express their opinions if they differ from his or hers. This lack of respect creates a need to control others' opinions and actions. Control starts at emotional and verbal levels, with sarcasm, name-calling, yelling, ridiculing, and threatening. Often, controlling behavior manifests as anger because controllers get angry when they don't "win." Controllers become stressed and more aggressive as the battle continues. Controlling behavior escalates into economic control, isolation, intimidation, and physical abuse when emotional or verbal controls aren't effective. Controlling behavior continues, even when it causes great

stress, because the controller feels more anxiety and pain by not being in control than by mistreating loved ones or colleagues.

What if coworkers think you are controlling, but you disagree? You must understand that your behavior causes problems, but you can have your needs met in acceptable ways. Understand that you will not always be in control because you don't have the right to be. If you want a peaceful, happy life, it is essential to become less controlling.

First, take responsibility. Controlling behavior is caused by the controller, not by others. You have no right to control others' behavior, no matter what they do! Ultimately, you have the right to control only yourself.

Commit to change – stop yelling, discuss issues calmly and rationally, and avoid sarcasm and name calling. Accept that others may act in ways of which you disapprove.

Accept that it takes time to change. It may take years to eradicate controlling behavior. Seek professional counseling.

Understand the problem. Educate yourself about controlling behavior.

Practice vulnerability. Be open to feedback and constructive criticism. Develop a "thank first, defend later" attitude.

Share information. Teams benefit when all members have access to necessary information. Demonstrate the belief that "if the team wins, we all look good" rather than "If I win, I look good."

Share leadership. Reduce the frequency of you being the one in charge.

Show that you can share responsibility for the team's work without demanding the outcome.

As you become less controlling, you will reduce others' resentment toward you, as well as adversarial relationships. People will be more inclined to help you succeed. You will benefit by reducing your stress level.

