

Getting Connected, Staying Connected

Love, Jealousy, and Abuse

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Jealousy is common for both men and women. Extreme jealousy sometimes can lead to physical and emotional abuse. Couples should discuss their feelings of jealousy and try to reach a reasonable compromise regarding this issue before jealousy spirals out of control. This is No. 10 in a series of 20 NebGuides that focus on building and maintaining strong couple and family relationships written by a team of University of Nebraska–Lincoln Extension Educators.

Jealousy is a common feeling for both men and women. When we are jealous, we tend to want to have our loved one all to ourselves, exclusively. Competition from others causes jealous partners to feel insecure, hurt, and angry. Extreme feelings of jealousy can lead to extreme behavior, and partners are sometimes abused physically and emotionally by the jealous party.

Some couples agree to try to avoid situations that can spark jealous feelings. This can be very difficult, of course, when you work with people of the other sex or even when you have friendships with people of the same sex that you would like to maintain. Some partners, especially women, feel as if their male partner is overly controlling and feel almost trapped by his jealous feelings. They try to reassure their partner that he has nothing to worry about. Some men, however, cannot seem to control these feelings.

Couples should talk openly and honestly about jealousy and what makes each partner jealous. They should make a genuine effort to come to some reasonable compromise in regard to these issues. This is much easier to do than trying to deal with a situation in which jealousy has spiraled out of control.

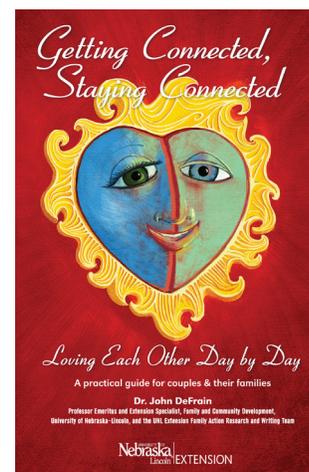
Individuals are likely to be somewhat different in their feelings about jealousy: Some individuals might be more

quick to feel jealous than others, having less tolerance for relationships with other people; some individuals might be more jealous about the partner having a friendship with a member of *the other sex*, while some might be equally jealous about an outside friendship with *either* sex; also, some individuals are especially jealous about sexual involvement outside the couple relationship, while others feel more threatened by outside friendships that may, or may not, be sexual in nature.

A good way to prevent problems from developing is to try to personally avoid social situations in which you might be tempted to enjoy the company of other people who would make your partner jealous, and situations that might entice you into behavior with others that you could end up seriously regretting. An affair, either an emotional affair or a sexual affair, can be disastrous to a marriage. Some family therapists argue that the vast majority of divorces are related to an extramarital affair.

If you are not ready to settle down and end your period of dating (shopping) around, it is unwise to try to hold on to a partner and expect him to remain committed to you while you are still interested in being with other people. This behavior is simply not fair to your partner, nor is it fair to new people with whom you would like to enjoy spending time.

Because our feelings about jealousy are all so individualistic, it is important to discuss this issue in an effort to prevent



For more information about strong couple and family relationships, refer to the book *Getting Connected, Staying Connected*, which can be ordered online at amazon.com.

serious problems later on. A few thoughts that might prove useful during your discussion:

- Jealousy is a pretty normal feeling, in the sense that many people feel jealousy on occasion.
- If you don't ever feel jealous, it might be because you believe your partner is very trustworthy, or you might simply not care all that much about your partner.
- Jealousy crosses the borderline into abusive behavior when the jealous person loses all trust for his partner and tries to control every aspect of the person's life.
- If your anger is getting out of control and you harbor violent thoughts toward your partner and her friends, it is time to find a therapist who can help bring rational thinking back into your discussions with each other.
- For loving relationships to work, honesty is clearly the best policy.

For greater understanding of the topic in this publication, refer to *Getting Connected, Staying Connected: Loving One Another Day by Day* written by John DeFrain and the University of Nebraska–Lincoln Family Action Research and Writing Team. (2012). Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.

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