

Controlling Techniques

Susan Peabody

When most people are not getting their needs met they leave. Codependents and love addicts try to take control.

Image Management

Image management is what love addicts do to control someone's impressions of them through what amounts to deceit and dishonesty, or just hiding who they really are. When they are just getting to know someone, love addicts who are image managers try to:

Nagging

Nagging is an attempt to wear someone down so they will give in to you, even if they don't want to. Love addicts love to nag (if it works), because it is a nonthreatening way to get what they want (*need*). They don't know how to communicate their needs in any other way or how to find a person who doesn't need to be nagged. Therefore, nagging becomes a habitual way to manage a partner rather than face the inadequacies of the relationship or work on improving themselves. (Nagging includes nonstop criticism and advice.)

Being Helpless

Acting helpless around a partner is another classic passive-aggressive controlling technique used by some love addicts. It projects the unspoken message that "I can't survive without you." If this works, a love addict will try it. Women especially like to rationalize this as being "feminine" or "stroking a man's ego." They won't do anything alone, and they avoid all activities that suggest they can take care of themselves.

Projecting Guilt

Often, when love addicts find themselves in a situation where their needs are not being met, they attempt to manipulate the situation by trying to make their partner feel guilty. They keep a long list of their partner's transgressions and don't hesitate to remind them of every mistake they ever made. Or they play the martyr when their partner is out of line, hoping this will stimulate remorse and change.

Stimulating Jealousy

Because love addicts are so insecure, they need constant reassurance that a relationship is going strong. Stimulating their partner's jealousy is an attempt to capture this reassurance — to control it. It is also used as a way to keep one's partner on edge and anxious to please. Or sometimes it is used as a way to draw a partner back into a relationship when he or she seems to be straying. Of course this is often rationalized as an acceptable way to keep the relationship exciting, but it is really a controlling technique and has no place in a healthy relationship.

Flattery

Flattery is fine if it is a genuine attempt to stroke your partner as part of your mutual support of each other. However, if it is just a way to "soften up your partner" it is another form of passive-aggressive controlling.

Sex

Sex has historically been a powerful way to keep your partner hooked or under control. There are names for this sort of control—seduction, *bedroom politics* or *pillow talk*. If love addicts have a sexual hold on their partner they will not hesitate to use it to keep a tight rein. Some love addicts rely so heavily on their ability to keep a partner "coming back for more," that they panic when there is something on the agenda besides making love. They feel unlovable if the relationship does not include sex, and worry about losing their partner if lovemaking grows stale.

Negative Caretaking

Negative caretaking means doing for others what they should be doing for themselves; giving more than you are receiving; and taking on more than your share of the responsibility for the survival of a relationship. This can mean taking care of people's material needs, organizing their life, covering up for them, doing their work, finding them a job, making their decisions, bailing them out of trouble, ad infinitum.

An Attack of Hysteria or Rage

An attack of hysteria or rage is an adult version of a temper tantrum. It is how love addict attempt to recapture control when they feel that it is escaping their grasp. Typically, women get hysterical and men fly into a rage but these roles can be reversed. (Of course, hysteria is a passive aggressive controlling technique like the others I have mentioned, but rage is an overt controlling device.)

Both hysteria and rage are characterized by excessive or uncontrollable emotion such as fear or panic, and can manifest themselves as irrational tears, laughter, anger, or violence. They can also be self-induced as a dramatic ploy, but they are usually a genuine reaction to desperation and fear. The paradox of hysteria and rage is that they are the attempt to gain control by losing control.

As controlling techniques, both hysteria and rage are very effective because they can be very intimidating. People are easily convinced to give the hysterical or angry person whatever they need to calm them down.

Susan Peabody from *Addiction to Love*