



#RELATIONSHIPS & FAMILY

Is your relationship healthy or overly possessive?

Feeling protective towards your partner, married or otherwise, often stems from a deep-seated commitment. It is natural, sometimes healthy even, when you feel responsible for your partner. However, there is a fine line between being protective and dominating or controlling your loved ones.

Shahrina Ferdous, who has been a Consultant Psychologist at Serenity, a psychological support centre in Chattogram, sheds light on this further.

"Identifying a dominating attitude is not easy, as it is often disguised as 'protecting' the other person from harm's way," she explains, adding, "However, this pattern of behaviour over a prolonged period can edge dangerously close to oppression."

So, the questions here would be, how to understand when you or your partner has fallen prey to over-possessiveness and when to act on it. Signs are always there but be it from the fear of confrontation or embarrassment, we often tend to dismiss them hoping they would fix themselves. And that's the first mistake.

Over-monitoring, such as an incessant demand to know where you are, or constant looking into your social media, may be a sign of over-possessiveness. It is not a fault for your partner to ask if you have reached home/work safely but a series of phone calls and sometimes abrupt video calls just to know where you are, what you are doing, etc. cannot be healthy.

The patterns often include attempts at

isolation, in which the spouse deliberately tries to keep you from seeing friends and family and get all of your attention by actively discouraging you from doing so.

A fundamental component of over-possessiveness is a lack of trust, jealousy, and unsubstantiated charges which can be seen in an ongoing need for validation of love and commitment. Furthermore, attempts to regulate decision-making, starting from wardrobe selections to significant life decisions, highlight how overly possessive people undermine autonomy.



According to consultant Ferdous, it is of utmost importance that we do not ignore these signs and our own instincts. She states, "When we start to feel the small changes in our partner, it would be to communicate your feelings, as often as you can."

Psychologists unanimously agree that maintaining open lines of communication is essential to managing relationships. It's

crucial to follow your instincts and take immediate action if something makes you uncomfortable. Simply talking about expectations, boundaries, and individual needs can, to a great extent, help you understand each other and where you stand in the relationship. Sometimes, the complexities of the problem will necessitate the need to seek professional help.

Contrary to popular belief, it is not a sign of 'weakness' to seek professional help for your relationship or marital problems. It does not mean that separation is inevitable, and it is definitely not the end. If anything, the mutual decision to go for therapy is a sign of strength in itself.

As Shahrina Ferdous walks us through the process, she repeatedly mentions the confidentiality that each couple receives at all times.

The talking usually begins with a joint assessment where both partners actively participate. This initial step helps identify the dynamics at play and sheds light on whether one partner is exerting undue dominance, pressuring the other into submission.

Next, consultants tend to separate the couple during a therapy session which serves as a crucial time for reflection, allowing the partner with over-possessive tendencies to realise the impact of their actions while providing the victim with the space to have a clear state of mind and a plan for dealing with the situation.

"This usually goes for 2 to 3 weeks depending on the complexity of the situation," explains Ferdous.

"A therapist will guide the victim on effective communication strategies, emphasising the importance of being assertive or passive depending on the circumstances. On the other hand, the dominating partner will be brought to the realisation of how their actions are negatively impacting their relationship."

Once each of the parties is clear on where they stand from their point of view, the couple is brought together again. With guidance from their counsellor, partners openly address the points they want to work on to help understand each other again.

According to Ferdous, this process is neither easy nor quick. It requires both spouses to unlearn and re-learn many things, and some days are worse than others. But with the right motivation and efforts, it is often possible to find a middle ground and maybe make your relationship better than it ever was.

It should not feel like a life sentence to be in a relationship. It ought to feel freeing and empowering. If you find yourself anything less than that, it's time to have a conversation. Be open and honest with each other as you work through the challenging moments together.

By Nusrath Jahan