

When Your Partner's Thinking or Actions Seem Wrong

-A- She becomes physically aggressive or threatens you:

- She pushes, shoves, grabs, hits, physically restrains you, blocks you from leaving the room, or follows you around, refusing to allow you to remove yourself from her presence
- She threatens physical harm

Get away from her as quickly as possible. If you fear that you could be harmed, do what you can to pacify her or protect yourself for the moment. Once you are alone, consider what it would take for you to feel safe while having a conversation with her (using the guidelines below) about her aggressiveness.

-B- She commits an Obvious Offense:

- She intentionally lies to you or deceives you
- She is sexually unfaithful
- She fails to keep a clear agreement, with admittedly no good reason
- She badmouths or undermines you
- She violates your privacy or personal space
- She makes an irreversible, unilateral decision regarding something about which she knows you have strong feelings.

-C- She commits a Disagreement-Related Offense:

- She concludes that you are wrong when you're not
- She's defensive
- She's dismissive
- She puts you down
- She's unwilling to compromise
- She acts high and mighty
- She shuts down or walks away in spite of your flexible and open-minded attitude
- She won't argue for what she wants; instead she blames you for being controlling

-D- Her actions are not listed in boxes A, B or C, but they still seem wrong:

(For example, her opinions seem stupid, irrational, immature, short-sighted, biased, unrealistic, excessive or unwarranted; or her conduct seems selfish, irresponsible, inattentive, insensitive, immature, lazy, inconsiderate, self-absorbed, unfeeling, uncaring, needy, controlling, or negative.)

The guidelines in this flow chart don't apply.
Use the guidelines offered in the article, "Reacting Effectively When Your Partner Says or Does Something That You Don't Like or Agree With."

- Relax and take your time. Assume that when you talk to her she will understand that what she did was wrong, if you can avoid implying that she is an awful person for doing it.
- When you are alone, if you have thoughts about how awful your partner is for treating you the way she did, try to temper these thoughts by reminding yourself of things like: "What she did was wrong, and I'm not going to continue our relationship as usual unless she acknowledges it and takes steps to make sure it won't happen again. But I'm no angel myself, and I'm really not in a position to act all high and mighty. It isn't going to help if I get all indignant and act like she's a horrible person."
- Remember that if inside you continue to feel disgusted, outraged or indignant about what she did, or if you're making a big deal in your mind about how awful she was for doing it, chances are very slim that she'll be able to really care about your feelings and feel bad about what she did.
- Don't let the fact that her conduct is unacceptable distract you from the possibility that she might have frustrations that could be valid. Be prepared to discuss them, but only if she first acknowledges the seriousness of her aggressive actions or gestures and is willing to take steps to prevent them from occurring again.
- Explain to her that, 1) regardless of how valid her complaints about you might be, you will not tolerate the kind of harmful conduct she has engaged in, and 2) you are unwilling to consider continuing your relationship normally unless she acknowledges the harmfulness of her conduct and is willing to take steps needed to prevent further such conduct from happening. If she acknowledges the seriousness of wrongdoing and accepts full responsibility, be prepared to discuss any complaints or dissatisfactions that she may have with you.

She is defensive, dismissive, unapologetic, or tries to change the subject...

With a respectful attitude, refuse to continue business as usual.

She understands why you are upset, acknowledges that she shouldn't have done the hurtful or destructive thing(s), and/or says that from now on she will do things differently.

She's apologized before, and now she's done the same type of thing again.

Tell her that in order to feel confident it won't happen again, you need to know that she is sincere, and has a viable plan for change. Ask her to explain it to you.

If she is upset that you won't just take her word for it and she accuses you of being unwilling to accept an apology...

This is the first time she's done this sort of thing or acknowledged that she shouldn't have done it.

1) Resume your relationship as usual; 2) let her know that it might take some time before you can feel like normal again; and/or 3) tell her things she can do that might help.

If she assures you that she is sincere and non-defensively explains her plan for change.

Accept her acknowledgement and move on.