

Control Battles In Your Relationship

How do you and your partner deal with the "Big 6?"

BY STACY PHILLIPS

Relationships are not easy. Not one of them can work without some give and take. If you are in a committed relationship and having problems with that relationship, perhaps you have not come to grips yet with why that is so. Chances are, the two of you are engaged in control battles over one or more of the "Big Six." When relationships get into trouble it is almost always due to control being *an* issue or *at* issue. Fighting for control in one department or another in the Big Six is what always causes friction and—if not dealt with appropriately—discord that can lead to a breakup. Many breakups can be avoided, though, if only more couples would work out their control issues.

What comprises the Big Six? They are basic categories or areas where control is, or can be, an issue in a relationship. These areas include:

1. Money/Property/Wealth
2. Children
3. Health (Physical and Mental)
4. Loss of Love/Intimacy
5. Growth (Personal and Professional)
6. Fear (Physical/Emotional/Psychological)

Control Is a Tricky Thing

What you should know is that control can be good, bad or more often in between. There is no standard by which it can be measured. Sometimes control is a detriment when a person uses it to coerce, be it aggressively or passively; sometimes it is good when used appropriately; and other times it can be a toss up. The reality is control is prevalent in any relationship. And when couples are jockeying for control as opposed to sharing control, it *always* becomes a contest. Why? By nature, people are typically competitive.

So then, you can probably see, without exception, when a relationship is strained, someone is invariably in control in one or more of these six departments, while the other is out of control. Or, quite often, a couple is in a tug 'o war vying for control in one or more of these six areas.

Let me take a moment to talk about when control *does* work. In most personal relationships that do work, one of the three dynamics has to be in place: either one party is designated as the "Controller" and the other the "Controllee"—the dominate and the submissive—and they enjoy their respective "roles," or both have an understanding as to who will control *what* (like he handles the money, and she has the last word on rearing the children). Or in the idyllic relationship—my value judgment—both are equal partners, sharing in decisions and authority somewhat evenly. This is rather rare though; for where there are couples, there are differences. So, if control is not bothersome, a relationship can stay together, unscathed; but once control becomes an irritant or a big deal the relationship falters.

More on control—it is fickle. Each couple's circumstances and relationship can evolve and change, often dramatically over time. This is especially true where any or all of the Big Six are involved. So naturally then, the balance of power in the relationship can also evolve and change. It's truly mystifying. And, what is even more baffling is that two people can have control at the same time, but over different issues. That, too, can change. True it can provide a status quo as it transforms, but it can just as easily and suddenly shift and shuffle, sometimes causing total chaos.

Where in the Big Six Are You?

Just where do you stand in the control department with your partner in relation to the Big Six? To find out, you first need to identify whether you are the "Shot-Caller" (Controller) or the "Controllee" in each of the Big Six.

Here are four tasks you can undertake to make that determination:

1. Identify where you are in terms of control in the geography of the Big Six (Do you decide which investments to make while your significant other gets to call the shots with regard to how often you have sex?).
2. Pinpoint who or what is in control (Has a recent illness caused you to turn over discipline decisions regarding the children to your spouse, effectively putting the *illness* in the control seat?).
3. Evaluate whether or not you want or need control in each of the categories of concern (Can you give up your insistence as to what religious organization to support if your partner suddenly announces he/she has decided she/he has grown in a different spiritual direction?).
4. Pave the way to introduce opportunities that will aid you in reclaiming, asserting, or relinquishing control (Might that require a face-to-face meeting with your mate to express your control struggles and your preferences? This allows you to negotiate or delineate some control boundaries).

Important to Remember

Ironically, when we acquiesce to our significant other, and give him/her control—give instead of take, or follow instead of lead—we are far more *in* control than when we attempt to *be* the "Controller" much of the time. (Beware: Those who feel the need to always control are effectively out of control!) That is not to say that you should not assert control. If you get into the habit of relinquishing your true self, that will work to your detriment so decide what you can give up to get and what you have to stand fast on. You don't want to lose yourself in this delicate process. That is one of the biggest mistakes many couples make.

The ultimate goal is to attempt to keep the control in the relationship—between the two of you—at parity. When control is lopsided, you can be relatively certain the relationship will eventually hit the wall. You cannot be the "Shot-Caller" in all things. Think about the Big Six and decide where you stand: Are you the "Shot-Caller" or the Controllee? Of the Big Six where you play either role, are you comfortable with your "control" arrangement? Again, strive for balance. And, if control issues are causing turmoil in your relationship, do something about them. Relationships that work—where both parties feel whole—always call for open communication because only then can you come to resolution and agreement with regard to control issues.

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