

A FREE READER GUIDE

25

RED FLAGS

*The Warning Signs of a
Controlling Relationship*

A private self-check for you, or for someone you love

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Before You Begin

Controlling relationships rarely announce themselves. They begin with attention that feels like devotion, and they tighten slowly, one small concession at a time, until the person inside can no longer see the shape of what is happening to them.

This checklist gathers twenty-five of the most commonly reported warning signs into five stages. Read each one slowly. Tick the box only if it describes something that has happened more than once.

How to use it. Use it for your own relationship, or with someone you are worried about. Be honest; nobody else needs to see your answers. At the end you will find what your score may mean, and where to go next.

Important. This guide is for education and self-reflection. It is not a diagnosis and does not replace professional advice. If you are in danger, contact your local emergency services immediately.

STAGE ONE

The Rush

- ☐ **01** They declared intense love or "soulmate" talk within days or weeks.
- ☐ **02** Constant messages and calls felt flattering at first, then expected.
- ☐ **03** They pushed for fast commitment: moving in, exclusivity, big promises.
- ☐ **04** Gifts or grand gestures arrived right after an argument or a boundary.
- ☐ **05** They said no one had ever understood them the way you do.

Boxes ticked in this stage: _____ / 5

STAGE TWO

The Narrowing

- ☐ **06** They criticise or mock the friends and family you are closest to.
- ☐ **07** Plans with other people trigger sulking, guilt or arguments.
- ☐ **08** You see people less often because it is "easier" than the fallout.
- ☐ **09** They want to be included in, or present for, every social event.
- ☐ **10** You have started hiding small, normal things to avoid a reaction.

Boxes ticked in this stage: _____ / 5

STAGE THREE

The Watch

- ☐ **11** They check your phone, messages or location, or demand passwords.
- ☐ **12** They expect an immediate reply and treat silence as a betrayal.
- ☐ **13** They comment on or decide what you wear, eat, spend or post.
- ☐ **14** Money, transport or access to shared things is used as leverage.
- ☐ **15** You feel you need permission for ordinary decisions.

Boxes ticked in this stage: _____ / 5

STAGE FOUR

The Twist

- ☐ **16** They deny things you clearly remember saying or happening.
- ☐ **17** Your reactions are described as "crazy", "too sensitive" or "dramatic".
- ☐ **18** Apologies come with conditions, or turn into your fault.
- ☐ **19** Affection is switched off as punishment and switched on as reward.
- ☐ **20** You often feel confused, and you have started doubting your own judgement.

Boxes ticked in this stage: _____ / 5

STAGE FIVE

The Fear

- ☐ **21** You plan what you say around avoiding their anger.
- ☐ **22** They have threatened to leave, expose you, or harm themselves to stop you.
- ☐ **23** They have broken, thrown or hit things during arguments.
- ☐ **24** They have grabbed, pushed, blocked or hurt you, even "only once".
- ☐ **25** You feel relief when they are away, and dread when they return.

Boxes ticked in this stage: _____ / 5

What Your Score May Mean

0 to 3 ticks. Some friction exists in most relationships. Keep an eye on whether any of these signs repeat or grow.

4 to 9 ticks. A pattern may be forming. Talk to someone you trust outside the relationship and notice whether your world is getting smaller.

10 or more ticks. These are strong signs of a controlling dynamic. You deserve support. Consider speaking to a counsellor or a domestic abuse support service in your country.

Any tick in Stage Five, whatever your total, is a safety concern on its own. Make a plan for your safety and reach out for help.

Where to find help. In the United States: National Domestic Violence Hotline, 1-800-799-7233, or text START to 88788. In the United Kingdom: National Domestic Abuse Helpline, 0808 2000 247. Elsewhere, search for your national domestic abuse helpline, or contact local emergency services if you are in danger.

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RED FLAGS

The Signs You Were Trained to Ignore

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Why You Love the One Who Hurts You

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DEAD END

Book One of the True Crime Deep Dive series

amazon.com/dp/B0H3DX41MW