

Anxiety to
→ ***Action***



How to respond constructively when your
partner is limerent for someone else

Living with a partner who has become limerent for someone else is tough. When you first come to realize that the person who committed to you has now become besotted with another person, a lot of complex emotions are involved. Betrayal, shame, anger, sadness and fear are the obvious ones, of course, but there are also more subtle psychological impacts. Grief for the loss of the person you fell in love with and – especially if you have children – grief for the family unit that has apparently been invaded from the outside (with the help of a turncoat within). Many people also feel embarrassment, mixed up with the weirdly contradictory desire to both keep the revelation secret and declare to the world how badly your partner has hurt you.

The abiding impact, though, is the anxiety and frustration of not understanding what is happening, or why, or what it means for all the old plans and certainties that you thought were the foundation of your life.

She won't stop and it's affecting her attitude at work and becoming forgetful. She also doesn't like talking about our relationship and screws up her face and says "I don't remember that"... or lets out a long sigh or makes a sarcastic comment at me.

He has totally portrayed me as the bad guy, I am awful, he is lucky to be out etc. He tramples on my feelings, and has absolutely no empathy with me or our children. It's all about himself. It is like he has totally lost his moral compass.

When she recently returned to work it took 4 months for her to meet someone and decide to “give up on the marriage”. There had been no fighting, no major issues. She didn’t even try to suggest marriage counseling.

My husband is into a limerent affair. I don’t know for how long. He has been neglecting us his family and refuses to talk to me and is always angry with me.

Naturally enough, many people who suffer through watching their partners go all weak-kneed and dreamy over someone else – while simultaneously slandering their old life and family – wonder what they can constructively do to take action. Waiting, hoping and pleading is not a promising strategy. It would be much better to find an effective way to disrupt the cycle of limerence and get through to your partner to try and find out what hope there is of salvaging the relationship.

That’s what this guide is about. It’s a distillation of the key steps that you can take to move from passive anxiety to positive action. Nothing can guarantee the outcome of this – because there are too many unknowns, and your ultimate fate will be a combination of both your and your partner’s decisions. But hopefully, these steps will get you to meaningful progress in a faster and more determined way, and mean that when you have to make difficult decisions, they will be better informed.

There are ten steps, and they are covered in roughly the order that you are likely to encounter them. Let’s make a start...

1

SECURE YOUR FOUNDATIONS

Step one is the absolute cardinal principle for coping with the turmoil of losing your partner to limerence: **look after yourself.**

You may hear this a lot from well-meaning friends or family, of course, and there is a danger that it can sound like a simple platitude: *“oh, do look after yourself won’t you, dear?”*

But it is a profoundly important first step and emotional North Star. This isn’t an airy suggestion to go to the spa (or bar) for some “me time”, this is about securing your foundations. To get through this, you will need to draw on inner reserves of strength, and the best way to manage that is to look after yourself. Don’t sideline your own needs, or martyr yourself, or try to figure out if you could have done something earlier to stop this from happening. Focus on securing your own emotional resilience, because you are likely to need it.

One reason is – as you have no doubt noticed – your partner is *not* currently looking after you. Their attention is absorbed elsewhere, and they are almost certainly neglecting their responsibilities and behaving in an erratic and uncharacteristically selfish or inconsiderate way. For partners that have previously been loving and supportive this is especially hard to cope with. They seem to have undergone a personality transplant.

I don’t understand what’s happened to my lovely husband. He was always caring and once said he would never cheat on me and now he’s acting like that’s the only thing he wants to do. It’s like he hates me.

Seek out support from trusted friend or mentors. Go online and find supportive forums and communities of people who understand what you are going through (and who can save you from exhausting the patience of even the best of friends). Make time to do the things that bring you peace – walking, music, sport – whatever it is that you need to help arm yourself against the emotional strain of the betrayal. If you have children that need to be supported too, then it's more important than ever for you to prioritise your own health and mood. It's so difficult to keep to good habits of sleep, healthy eating and exercise when it feels like your world is experiencing an earthquake, but maintaining healthy habits is enormously beneficial for your emotional and physical strength.

If you can afford it, individual therapy can also be a wise decision. At first, it would be best to talk to someone independent about yourself on a one-to-one basis so they can help you understand what you are going through and process your emotions. Having access to someone neutral and experienced who is motivated to help you succeed can be a real boost. Couples marriage counselling should only be considered at a later stage, once you have organized your own thoughts and feelings about the situation.

An unpleasant truth about your spouse succumbing to limerence is that they have risked the terms of the partnership and pushed you into a position of isolation. For a while, you have to accept that reality, and recognize that your lives will be running on parallel tracks. *Not* behind them. *Not* running to keep up. Parallel. You, working on your own life, while they sort themselves out. The combination of their choices and your choices will ultimately

determine what happens with the partnership, so you need to care for yourself and give yourself the best chance of making good choices.

It's the cardinal principle. Always come back to it.

2**UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THEM**

The behaviour of limerents can be inexplicable to an outside observer. Someone you previously respected and thought you understood appears to have turned into a lovesick teenager. It's normal to wonder what happened. Have they always been like this, or have they been seduced by some mate-poaching scumbag? Or – and it's natural to wonder this – have they fallen out of love with you because the partnership has died?

The first thing to make clear is that this is their fault. There could be all kinds of mitigating circumstances, but none of that matters. They are still accountable for their own actions and decisions. OK, fine, that's settled – but there is still a crisis to deal with, so let's dive into what is going on with them.

Limerence is, at a basic level, a neurochemical phenomenon. Your partner has encountered someone who matches a particular pattern of traits – their appearance, mannerisms, demeanour, personality, scent, laugh (it can be any number of idiosyncratic triggers) – that activates some specific neural systems that we all have, but has sent them into overdrive.

The key ones that matter are the reward, arousal, and bonding systems, which are powered by dopamine, noradrenaline and oxytocin, respectively. The specific details of this neurochemical soup do not matter too much – it's fascinating, but a little beside the point. The point is that they are genuinely in an altered state of mind when it comes to their “limerent object”. The combination of euphoria and

overarousal means they are literally perceiving the world differently when they are in the midst of limerence.

It's like my world has been in gray my whole life and now it's suddenly in color. I feel this crazy mixture of shame, euphoria, humiliation, bliss, guilt, anxiety, loss, yearning. I feel like I'm going crazy.

At this point it is worth reflecting on whether you have ever experienced limerence yourself. If you have, then you can hopefully understand what they are going through. If not, then believe this jaded limerent when I say that it is an intoxicating thrill that is almost unrivalled in its intensity. The best way of explaining the experience, in my opinion, is as “person addiction”. This other person – this limerent object (LO) that they are projecting all their emotional needs and fantasies onto – is like a drug, a natural high. And can be overindulged to the point of craving and dependency.

To return to the earlier point: none of this is an excuse. They made the bad choices that led them into the spiralling addiction, but it is also important to realize that it isn't a trivial mistake for them to reverse. The limerence is happening in their head, and they can't escape that, even if they locked themselves in a room with no access to any communication devices. The only way out is for them to slowly rewrite the damaging mental program they have laid down for themselves, which identifies their LO as a source of exhilarating reward.

To get to that point of self-awareness, however, the limerent has to overcome a big barrier: cognitive dissonance. This is the

phenomenon experienced when trying to hold two contradictory ideas in your head at once. In this case: I am a good person *versus* I am betraying my partner. Now, very self-aware people can confront this by finding the actual correct answer: *“I am not as good a person as I thought I was.”*

Unfortunately, much more common is an attempt to resolve the dissonance by changing the terms of engagement. For example: *“I am still a good person, so this isn’t a real betrayal because actually my marriage is so bad that it no longer counts.”* Or: *“I am still a good person, so my spouse must deserve this mistreatment because they are an awful person.”* Or: *“This new love is so powerful that it proves all my previous beliefs were wrong.”*

That combination of neurochemical overload and cognitive dissonance is more than enough to account for the apparent wholesale changes in personality that your partner is exhibiting. To get them to see through those problems takes patience and luck. You’re not likely to be able to force them to see reason. You’re not likely to be able to appeal to their better nature. They are unlikely to be able to resolve this themselves with guilt and willpower alone.

Your best hope is to focus on yourself and your own goals for the future. But you *can* also help to steer them in the right direction...

3

UNDERSTAND WHAT IS HAPPENING TO YOU

Having established that limerence is a cause of large-scale changes in the neurochemistry of your partner, it's also worth recognizing that the same is true for you. Betrayal also causes a brainstorm. Yes, they are overaroused, but *so are you*. Threat detection is an even more powerful stimulus for noradrenaline release than desire, and suddenly with the revelation of emotional and/or physical infidelity by your partner, there are threats everywhere. They get exhilaration, you get anxiety. Another unfairness to add to the pile.

Betrayal exacts a heavy cost. You have to confront the fact that your present life has been shaken, and you can no longer trust your partner as much as you had previously assumed. In addition, all your future plans are now shaky too, because you aren't sure what's happening tomorrow, let alone whether you can plan for next year. Suddenly, all those dreams you had are fading. It also casts doubt on your past. If you didn't know this big thing about your partner, what else didn't you know? How long has this been going on? Are all your memories tarnished now, because you were blithely unaware that they were not as invested in the relationship as you?

It's no small thing to yank the emotional substructure from underneath someone. Unfortunately, infidelity is fairly commonplace, and so there is also a contingent of insensitive people out there who have a dismissive attitude to the impact of betrayal. "*Plenty more fish in the sea*", or "*nobody's perfect*" are facile. This is a seismic change in your relationship dynamic and it's important to

have compassion for yourself.

The scale of this impact will depend on the depth of betrayal, of course. If your partner disclosed openly, and has not disclosed their feelings to the limerent object, then you have a good chance of rebuilding your relationship. They are still trustworthy and are seeking help from you to cope with the problem (as a partner should). If, however, the limerence has progressed to an emotional or physical affair then the scale of the psychological impact on you will be much greater. Everyone has their own “red lines” in a relationship – is an emotional affair better or worse than a one-night stand? – but don’t try and dismiss your pain because you think you should be coping better.

Finally, and less nobly, there is also suffering to be had because of other, troubling emotions. One is pride. Why have they chosen LO over you? By golly, you’ll show them! Or: how could they make such a fool out of you? Another close friend of pride is resentment. How could they cast you into this role? Why does your life now have to be like this because of their stupidity and selfishness?

There’s righteous anger to be felt about how they have behaved and how they have betrayed you, and there’s also the slightly less righteous anger about your ego being bruised. It’s healthy and normal to feel both, but also good to try and mitigate the latter if you can.

4

DON'T COMPETE

After understanding their emotional landscape and your own, the next step is more practical. What to do next – or in this case, what to definitely not do.

You may be tempted to compete with your partner's limerent object. It's natural to ask yourself: what have they got that I haven't? Unfortunately, the answer is usually "novelty" and there's no real way you can compete with that.

More fundamentally, the urge to compete is a bad strategy. Here's a plain truth about affairs in general: the affair did not happen because the other person is more attractive/ successful/ desirable/ sensitive/ exciting than you. This is not about your shortcomings.

To really drive this home, many times the betrayed spouse is flabbergasted by the person that their partner has become infatuated with – they seem so dramatically different and, well, *low-grade*, that it's baffling that they could ever have been seduced by them. That's one of the things about limerence – it's quite egalitarian about who it latches onto. Even the most unpromising prospect can be the focus for infatuation, because the limerent becomes so besotted that all faults are overlooked, all consequences minimized and all other people pale in comparison.

Given that plain truth, trying to compete is a dud strategy. You can't "win" against limerence, and so you will only succeed in making yourself feel worse. Plus, it's humiliating to compete for a partner who is supposed to already be committed to you. Plus, even in the unlikely scenario that you do manage to seduce your partner back,

you will have just proven to yourself that your partner is a shallow and easily manipulated fool. You may think that already, but it's even worse to have proof.

There is a darker aspect to this too, which is sometimes called the "pick me" dance. Your partner may try to manipulate *you* by implying that if you had only behaved differently, or were more sexy, or more supportive, or more generous, or basically satisfied their desires more fulsomely, then maybe they would not be drawn to the limerent object so strongly...

You need to shut that manipulation down at the first hint. It's a major red flag. Your partner – the one who has gone and got obsessed with someone else – should be the one to be making changes first.

Finally, another dark path to avoid is revenge. It could be tempting to retaliate. You're not without your own attractions, after all. Two can play at the playing-away game. But that road just draws more people into your crisis. It's certainly an effective way to blow things up for good, and that might be the ultimate decision to make, but try to make it in a way that minimizes collateral damage to innocent bystanders.

5

BE HONEST WITH YOURSELF

The next step leads towards some decisions about what action you should take. Being honest with yourself about what you want, and what you need to happen, is critically important. What is the outcome you are hoping for? What is the long-term goal? Again, there are a few key principles to help guide thinking:

1. What do you really want out of a partnership?

What does an ideal relationship look like to you? It could be a simple loving and supportive partnership, or it could be that you need a deeper level of devotion and demonstrative affection. There is no wrong answer to this (except, “I want a self-sacrificing slave who lives to fulfil my every whim”), but it’s a question that surprisingly few people ask themselves. Much commoner is for people to fall in love and then try and figure out whether they are happy through a trial and error process of two weird and complicated souls trying to live together. The consequence is that all the subconscious mental scripts that were written into us through our childhood and adolescence assert themselves without bothering to let our executive brains know why they are throwing a tantrum. And we end up with the emotional bruises to prove it.

A seismic shock like limerence for another person *can* be used as a stimulus to finally properly review what you are seeking and why. This time is rarely wasted. You get to know yourself better, you get to define the parameters of what you really want, and you get to imagine a better future with a more satisfying and nourishing relationship in it.

2. What are you giving to the partnership?

The corollary of the previous point is that partnerships go two ways. If you can delineate what you want out of a relationship you can then ask yourself: are you *giving* that?

This can be a sobering question to answer. It is no mitigation for your partner's limerence, but it can be a bit of a shock to recognize that we are asking for more than we are giving. Or, it may be that you are giving too much, and are martyring yourself on a romantic notion of self-sacrifice. Neither of these scenarios are healthy.

What you give is equally important to what you receive, and reflection on that is a necessary step towards planning for how your relationship should proceed.

3. Avoid manipulation

Finally, another aspect of self-honesty is a careful examination of your own motives. When setting boundaries and making requests, you need to know that they are emerging from genuine needs and not from the desire to get your own back. Retribution can be cathartic, but it usually backfires. The temptation of short term revenge, or manipulating your partner into agreeing to something that is driven by a desire to see them suffer some of the pain or humiliation they have put you through, is best resisted. There could be some rough justice in it, but you'll also just be spreading more bitterness around.

6

THINK ABOUT BOUNDARIES

Continuing the principle that the only thing you can control is your own decisions, it's time to make some important choices about what changes you want to happen. In particular, what boundaries are you willing to accept when it comes to interactions between your partner and their limerent object?

This begins with an analysis of the constraints you and your partner are under. First, who is caught up in this mess? Work colleagues? Your children? Family friends? How much scope is there for your partner to cut their limerent object out of their lives completely, without repercussions? This may not be trivial for a close co-worker or family friend, but should be possible for a less integrated presence in your lives – a gym-buddy, social friend, or someone who works in the same company but not on the same team, for example.

Then, decide on your boundaries. Is complete No Contact imperative, or is limited contact acceptable? What does “contact” mean? Most people would say texting or messaging is contact, but does following them on Facebook or Twitter count? How quickly should this be implemented? What about accidental contact? What repercussions should follow a failure on their part?

This could seem like tedious nitpicking – after all, they *should* be distancing themselves as far and fast as possible! But it is very important to really get your decisions straight ahead of time. It is much easier to enforce firm and clear boundaries that are agreed at the outset, rather than trying to improvise in the moment when you discover they've been out for coffee or are both going to an out-of-

town conference.

The guiding philosophy here is to be emotionally honest with yourself about where your boundary really lies. Your partner is likely to resist complete no contact, or give false agreement but then break their promise – that’s kind of the nature of hard-to-resist cravings. Objectively, no contact is the most desirable outcome and it is a reasonable demand, but it does come with the quality of an ultimatum. It can be tactically savvy to look inwards and consider if you are OK with an acceptable compromise, such as a gradual process of reducing contact over a specified period of time. But equally, if you know that you will be suffering agonies of uncertainty and rejection over every moment of contact between them, that is fine. Acknowledge that and don’t put yourself under pressure to be “more understanding”.

It’s very valuable to do this work, even though it is painful to dwell on all the creative ways they might find to stick to the letter but not the spirit of the law. Because the thing about boundaries is that they only exist if they are enforced, so you absolutely have to hold to them once they are agreed. If you set a boundary and then let them overstep it without consequences, you are teaching yourself and them that your needs are unimportant.

Finally, an uncomfortable end to this phase is to ask: have my boundaries already been breached? Have they already gone too far? Would cutting contact now be shutting the barn door after the horse has bolted? Again, only you know where your emotional red lines are. If they have not crossed them and are committed to moving ever further away from them, there is hope.

7

PREPARE FOR CONFLICT

All the steps so far have been internal work: thinking deeply about your situation and what your desired outcomes are. The next stage will be to transition to external negotiation with your partner. This has the potential for conflict, so it pays to be ready for the conversation, because it is high stakes and high consequence, and so doing some careful and thoughtful preparation is very wise.

Asking your partner to acknowledge what they have done, and listen to what you want to happen next, is likely to meet resistance. Nobody likes being confronted with their shortcomings, and defensiveness is almost inevitable. It's good diplomacy therefore to anticipate points of sensitivity and mentally prepare yourself for conflict.

The first issue is blame. This is simple. They are to blame.

Good. That's settled! Now what?

I don't mean to be glib. You can be completely clear in your mind about that core fact of the situation, but if you spend a lot of time and energy on insisting that they admit it, or that they must show contrition before any progress can be made, then you may get no further than that point. It is possible to sidestep the blame issue for a bit, while you negotiate the practicalities of how to make progress.

Ultimately, you want to work as a partnership to fix this problem. The limerence is happening in their head, but it is possible to work together in figuring out what the best next step is.

A good policy here is to plan ahead and schedule a specific time and place to have a discussion about the future of your partnership. Pick

a low stress moment – not on a birthday or anniversary or other clash that might distract from the task at hand, or taint a significant memory. Pick a place that is also not loaded with emotional significance. It may even be wise to pick somewhere unfamiliar – “neutral ground” – so that past arguments will not spring so readily to mind, and any bad memories of the meeting itself will not become branded onto your home environment. It is also a neat way of getting out of the usual psychological grooves that all our lives run in.

8**ANTICIPATE PITFALLS**

Having reviewed the state of your union, reflected on what you want your partnership to be like, and prepared for a meeting in which you can discuss your boundaries and your plans for the future, you next need to get the best you can out of that meeting.

Most high conflict conversations get halted by pitfalls. Different guides will list different numbers of the commonest barriers, but they can be collected into three big themes.

1. Judging

These pitfalls are based around one party taking upon themselves the authority to define right and wrong. Common examples are moralizing (“You disgust me”), criticizing (“You always do whatever he says”), insulting (“You are a bastard”) and even, in some circumstances, praising (“I’m glad you didn’t sleep with him”).

The reason that this is a pitfall is that it focuses on judging the character of the individual, rather than the consequences of their behaviour. It’s hard to make positive progress from there.

2. Pressuring

These pitfalls are about emotionally or logically pushing for a change in the other person’s behaviour. Classic examples would be setting an ultimatum, threatening them with punishments, ordering them to follow your guidance, badgering them with questions, or preventing them from communicating through interruptions or emotional outbursts.

Again, these are all natural responses to hearing emotionally

triggering or unreasonable statements by them, but they kill the forward progress of the discussion.

3. Minimizing

Minimizing involves disregarding the opinions, emotions or requests of the other party. Common examples would be dismissing concerns, diverting the conversation onto new topics, deflecting direct questions, and not listening to responses.

Although it can't really be considered "communication" as such, stonewalling is another major minimization tactic. To refuse to engage with the conversation, to lie, mock, belittle or deny reality are also all pitfalls. These last obstructions are probably better characterized as "chasms" than "pitfalls", as they are obvious displays of bad faith and a lack of willingness to be constructive.

These communication pitfalls are surprisingly easy to fall into. Even with the best of intentions and knowledge of where the pitfalls lie, it's depressing how often you can step in them. It appears to be a curse of human nature that our reflex response is to lurch towards one of them. It takes discipline and will to remain calm and focused on constructive dialogue.

9

COMMUNICATION BEST PRACTICE

Communication and conflict resolution are high level skills, and cannot be learned in a short handbook. If you can get access to more detailed training on this, it would be a great advantage. But there are, nevertheless, some keystone principles that make a disproportionate impact on the chance of success.

1. The Goal is to understand each other's position

This is the spirit in which you should enter discussions. You could even state it at the outset “I want us to understand what we are each going through”. Think of this more as a negotiation than a confrontation. You are not trying to browbeat them into agreement as an opponent – you are trying to discover if you can reach an acceptable agreement for both of you to go forwards. It may not be possible, but you will only know for sure if you have at least both made a clear articulation of what your position is and what is acceptable to you both.

2. Clear expression of your feelings

To properly understand what is driving someone else's behaviour you need to understand what they are feeling. Expressing your own feelings and having them acknowledged is also critical for being heard and feeling respected. So, this is another objective. Find a way to clearly and simply express what you are going through is key.

A particularly useful formulation here is to simply state “*When you do X, it makes me feel Y*”.

“When you text her when you are with me, it makes me feel you care more about her than me”

“When you go for dinner with him when I am at home, it makes me feel like I’m being cheated on”

There is no value judgement here. There is nothing but a clear statement of what you are feeling. Your partner can contest whether you *should* feel that, but they cannot reasonably contest that you do, in fact, feel that.

It’s also helpful to be concrete about this: *“When you are late home, I feel anxious and afraid”* is direct and unambiguous, *“You are driving me crazy!”* is not.

3. Avoid attributing motives

This sidesteps another conversational roadblock. If you attribute a motive to the other person for their behaviour, they can reasonably dismiss your claim on the basis that you are incorrect about their motives. *“You are lying to protect her!”* can be dismissed, whereas *“You are lying and I’m finding it hard to trust you”* cannot.

The other reason this is a good idea is that you don’t actually know their motives. Much better to focus on what happened and the impact (emotional and practical) it had on you, and then through conversation you may actually learn their true motives.

Similarly, if your partner keeps coming back to your motives and attacking your honesty, you can sidestep with *“those weren’t my motives, but let’s focus on what happened.”*

4, Practice reflective listening

Reflective listening is a very useful technique for deeply understanding what someone means, rather than just what they said. The core is to listen sufficiently attentively to be able to paraphrase back to your partner what they were expressing.

There are two elements here. First, you need to properly listen – weighing not just the words they say but how they say them and the emotional context. Second, you need to be able to empathize sufficiently to be able to express an accurate reflection of what they said.

To give an example:

Person 1: *“I can’t explain why I did it. I was just living in the moment. It didn’t seem real somehow.”*

Person 2: *“You got carried along by the excitement.”*

Person 2 may be forming all sorts of judgements and opinions and anger, but they nonetheless are able to mirror back to Person 1 that they have heard and understood what Person 1 was saying.

It takes practice to develop this skill. At first it can be useful to even just basically repeat what the other person says (this is not as peculiar as it first sounds – try it, most people won’t even notice). But the goal is to train yourself to focus on listening and understanding (taking deep breaths can also help). Then try to mirror the essence of what you think your partner has said.

Sometimes you will get it wrong, and they will object. That’s fine! It means you are getting closer to their correct meaning.

Person 1: *“I knew I shouldn’t have gone for coffee, but I didn’t want him to think I was avoiding him.”*

Person 2: *“You didn’t want to say no to him.”*

Person 1: *“No! It would just look weird if I said no this time when I’ve always gone before.”*

Person 2: *“You were worried that your behaviour would seem weird?”*

Person 1: *“Yes. It felt like I couldn’t avoid having to explain myself if I said no.”*

5. Be assertive but not aggressive.

Another key approach to communication is to be assertive without being aggressive. Assertive means sticking to your point, not letting the other person deflect or derail you, but stating your position calmly and clearly. That is a position of quiet strength and is the best way of standing your ground. Being aggressive – threatening, pressuring, emotionally volatile – is clearly undesirable unless you want to dominate and bully rather than resolve the conflict. Equally, being submissive and refusing to state your feelings honestly, or acquiescing to whatever they ask for, or pushing all the responsibility for the interaction onto them, is also a destructive stance.

A good example for clarifying the balance here is to look back to keystone 2 and the *“When you do X, it makes me feel Y”*, statement. That can initially provoke push-back. *“Well you shouldn’t feel that!”* or *“That’s ridiculous!”* or *“What do you expect me to do about that?”* An assertive but non-aggressive response to that sort of roadblock is

to calmly and clearly restate exactly the same statement: “*When you do X, it makes me feel Y*”. If that prompts more bluster or evasion, restate it again.

There are not many people (except the most disagreeable and argumentative) who can tolerate the clear restatement of a simple fact three times without at least being quiet for a moment and thinking about what is going on. It is assertive to persist until you have been granted the respect to be properly listened to. You don't need to thump the table or shout over your partner to be heard.

10**LOOK FOR MEANINGFUL
COMMITMENT**

The final stage of the process follows after the discussions have been had. If you have managed to navigate your way through them and clarified what you both want, and what you are both willing to commit to, you then need to look for meaningful examples of that commitment put into practice.

You may not reach this stage. It may be that at the end of this process, you instead learn that your partner is unwilling to be reasonable, and stonewalls all your best efforts at negotiation. That is certainly disappointing, but it is important that you learn it. It's not worth sinking any more love, effort or time into such an asymmetric partnership. Red flags to look out for in this category are: denial of evidence, dismissal of your concerns, disdain for your feelings, ongoing secrecy, anger, or blatant disrespect.

In contrast, it is possible that this process of self-reflection and honest communication can bring positive change. Good omens are that you feel heard, that they declare their commitment to overcoming their problem, that their behaviour changes, and their willingness to communicate increases. How far along your partner has progressed and how they have managed their limerence and cognitive dissonance can be determining factors, but these positive steps by you can be a force for good in helping them see more clearly.

Trying to make sense of your partner's limerence for someone else is an awful place to be, but all partnerships get stress-tested. None of us

are blameless paragons, but your best chance of coming through this is to look after yourself, be honest with yourself, and communicate clearly with your partner. Then look for engagement by them in an ongoing partnership of equals.

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