

Is Your Mate's Passive-Aggressive Behavior Crazy?

Is Your Mate's Passive-Aggressive Behavior Crazy? Kayla's husband Jon is an expert at getting out of things he doesn't want to do. He "forgets" to stop by the store on the way home from work when he doesn't want to be bothered. If he doesn't want to help Kayla with the house cleaning, he does such a poor job that she ends up redoing his part. Outwardly, Jon is agreeable and compliant. When Kayla asks him to do something, he'll generally say "okay" or nod in agreement. Kayla has been let down so many times now that she'll generally grill Jon on whether he will really remember to pick up the milk on the way home or drop off the cleaning. Each time he promises to remember, and sometimes he actually does follow through. But much of the time he never has any intention of doing what he doesn't want to be inconvenienced by. He has found that it's easier to say "yes" when asked and then offer an excuse. Jon has become an expert at sabotaging Kayla's efforts to get him to take on more responsibility with the kids and housework. He has "taught" her that he can't be depended on and that if she wants to be sure something is done right, she'll have to do it. Kayla has begun thinking that she doesn't really have two children, but instead that she really has three, counting her spouse. Behavior that was age-appropriate when Jon was five and deliberately "forgetting" to put his toys away after being asked isn't appropriate or helpful now as an adult. In fact, a pattern of passive-aggressive behavior can destroy intimacy and happiness in a marriage. Hidden Anger and Manipulation Create "Crazy-Making Behavior" Individuals with passive-aggressive behavior express their anger and hostility through indirect, passive actions. Instead of saying "I don't think it's fair that you expect me to clean the bathroom," he (or she) doesn't protest-he just never gets around to doing it. Then, when the mate eventually explodes after numerous frustrating experiences, the passive-aggressive partner just looks at the mate calmly, making her feel like the crazy one. He always has rationalizations and excuses ready and never takes responsibility or admits he's at fault in any way. He always blames someone or something else. He can be so convincing that sometimes the partner will find herself apologizing for getting so upset with him. Thus, the manipulation comes full circle and now the spouse still has the original problem on her shoulders-not enough help from her husband. He has "won" because he knows that he can get off the hook again whenever he needs to. Sarcasm and Sabotage Can Also Be Indicators The passive-aggressive spouse knows the weak spots of his partner and is often practiced in using sarcastic and cruel remarks under the guise of "humor". He'll say that the mate is too serious or doesn't have a sense of humor if she objects, but the "humor" is barbed with hostility and criticism-another indirect way of getting back at a partner instead of expressing feelings directly and looking for solutions. Many wives have had their diets sabotaged by a passive-aggressive husband who suddenly started bringing home candy or encouraging the wife to have dessert "just this one time". Fear of the spouse becoming too attractive and being noticed by other men is generally at the root of this type of passive-aggressive behavior. On the surface, the husband may sound supportive, but he is really working to sabotage the wife's efforts to improve her looks and wellbeing. He is threatened by it and doesn't want her to succeed. What Can You Do? Since the goal of passive-aggressive individuals is to resist demands from others, frustration and anger follows them wherever they go - especially in a marriage relationship. They are often critical, negative, "forgetful", sullen, resentful, and complaining. In addition, they are procrastinators and their performance on tasks they don't want to do is substandard. The following recommendations provide a starting place for a frustrated partner:

1. When your spouse makes a snide remark or uses sarcasm or barbed humor, calmly tell him that you don't find that way of communicating feelings acceptable. Stop what you're doing and sit down with him. State that he must be having some strong feelings to have made a remark like that and you'd rather he just come right out and tell you what he's feeling. Whatever you do, don't ignore the barbs or pretend you didn't hear them when you did. Confront him with what he's doing but without being drawn into an argument or becoming sidetracked by the excuses.
2. Know that when your intuition or "gut feeling" is that you're being manipulated or taken advantage of by the excuses and rationalizations or lack of response, you probably are right. Trust your intuition about this. It will help you to resist falling into the trap of taking on blame that's not yours and thinking that it's "all you".
3. When your spouse uses passive-aggressive behavior, state what you see happening and how confusing that is for you. Tell him that it's harming your marriage relationship for him not to be direct with you. Say that what he is doing is dishonest and manipulative and that you see through it, and if he values the marriage, he'll make an effort to change.
4. This is one time to take a tough stand on the necessity for marriage counseling. There are many issues that the two of you need to work on, including communication and anger.
5. If your spouse absolutely refuses to go to counseling, then make an appointment for yourself. Individual counseling can give you the resources and strength to confront your spouse's passive-aggressive behavior and pave the way for more direct communication.
6. Remind yourself that you didn't cause the passive-aggressive behavior. It's not your fault. This pattern was in place before you married. If your husband exhibits this behavior with you, you can bet that you're not the only one who sees this side of him. You can suggest counseling, but in the final analysis, it's your husband's problem.
7. The decisions you have to make are how to respond to the passive-aggressive behavior and what to do if your husband refuses to change or seek help. The counselor you are working with can help you to handle these hurdles and to decide if a marital separation might be an appropriate way to get your husband's full attention if nothing else works.

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