

BECKONING INSTEAD OF CHASING

Many relationships have a pattern in which one person is distant or detached and the other person wants closeness and pursues. The more the pursuer seeks closeness, the more the distancer pulls away. The distancer may avoid (nonsexual) intimate contact for fear of being suffocated, controlled, or robbed of independence. The pursuer may find that spending time alone feels like abandonment or that independent action is uncomfortable. Often, the pursuer will be the person to become dissatisfied with the situation and need to start making a difference. Change can begin with the following steps:¹

1. Leave others alone when they pull away. Don't follow, worry about, or punish them when they are in their own world.
2. Ignore your partner's distress if he or she doesn't want to talk: If your partner looks upset but says "I'm OK," he or she may mean, "Support my by not worrying" or "Let me handle it by myself." You can ask, "Would you tell me what is bothering you when you're ready?"
3. Develop your own pursuits and support system for times when your partner withdraws: Many people lose themselves (their interests, desires) in relationships. If you are upset or depressed when your partner is withdrawn, find other people to talk to.
4. When your partner shows interest in making contact, welcome him or her warmly: This is not the time to be punishing or to retaliate. Take advantage of these times for discussions and intimacy. Healthy relationships have a natural flow of distance and closeness.
5. At opportune times, initiate conversations by sharing your own ideas on a subject and then pause to hear your partner's. Tell your partner how much you've been enjoying yourself and wait to hear what he or she has done or thought. Do not interrogate!
6. Identify any underlying disorder that may be contributing to the problem: If your partner is unwilling or unable to get help, make a decision about whether or not the relationship has enough benefits to make it worth continuing.
 - a. Depression is a mood disorder that is usually very responsive to medication and/or therapy. Signs of mild depression that may go untreated are withdrawal, disinterest in sexual contact, inability to experience pleasure, few interests, little energy, difficulty organizing thoughts, and indecisiveness.
 - b. Personality disorders are long-standing patterns of behavior that significantly impair relationships. Loyalty, dependability, and a strong work ethic may be enough to sustain some relationships, but the following characteristics suggest a person who has little potential for intimacy and change:
 - Lack of interest in or enjoyment of close relationships.
 - Preference for solitary activities.
 - Rarely experiences or admits to strong emotions, even anger.
 - Unaffected by praise or criticism.
 - Almost no close friends other than first-degree relatives.
 - Avoids eye contact; unresponsive to facial expressions such as nods or smiles.

¹ Strategies for beckoning are adapted from *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* by John Gray (HarperCollins, 1992).