

Is this *normal*?

**15 RED FLAGS YOU MAY BE
MISSING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS**

By Lysa TerKeurst

Hi friend,

Here's a confession: I have dysfunctions. Other people I know have dysfunctions. Alive humans have dysfunctions.

It shouldn't be breaking news to you today that dysfunctions exist.

But what gets concerning is when we've danced around dysfunction in a relationship for so long that unfortunately, we've become accustomed to it. We're confronted with behaviors that make us feel uneasy, confused or even unsafe, but we feel powerless to make changes. Deep down we often wonder, *Is this normal? Is every relationship this hard?*

Maybe you feel like something is off, but you don't know why, Is this something to be concerned about or am I overreacting?

I personally understand how challenging it is to be in this place. But here's what I've been learning: **All relationships can be difficult at times, but they should not be destructive to our well-being.**

As image bearers of God (Genesis 1:26), we must honor what honors God. And in doing so, we must not confuse the good commands to love and forgive with the bad realities of enabling and covering up things that are not honoring to God.

In fact, when I turn to 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, I'm reminded of God's intention for the purest form of love and the types of relationships that we are worthy of cultivating. Here's what I journaled as I looked at these scriptures:

Love is not dishonorable.

Love does not justify wrongs to enable selfishness.

Love does not celebrate evil.

Love requires truth.

Love leads to honor, kindness and compassion.

Love calls wrong things wrong and hurtful things hurtful.

Not only is it OK for us to identify concerning behaviors and harmful actions against us, but it is biblical. It's not unchristian to require people to treat us in healthy ways.

Inside this resource, I've put together the tools for you to begin the journey of learning what is and isn't acceptable, what you will and will not tolerate, what is and isn't a red flag, and continue to grow in self-awareness. By knowing and practicing these things, we will live in healthier relationships that are for our good and God's glory.

Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Lysa', written in a cursive style.

As you take a look at this list of red flags, here are a few questions I want you to consider:

1. Is this a **mistake** or an ongoing **pattern** of behavior?
2. How often is this happening?
3. How severe is this?

This is why these questions matter: What we are looking for are patterns of hurtful and harmful behavior. A hurtful statement can be called a mistake. But a repeated pattern of hurtful statements or uncaring attitudes or even unjust expectations is much more than a mistake. These patterns are misuses of the purposes of a relationship. Why is this so crucial to understand? Because unchecked misuse of a relationship can quickly turn into abuse in a relationship.

15 RED FLAGS YOU MAY BE MISSING IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

1. They resist needed conversations or turn them against you. For example, when you bring up a topic that needs to be addressed, their denial of the issues at hand and the surrounding facts leaves you feeling like the crazy one.
2. They go back to unhealthy coping mechanisms when they have a bad day or a hard conversation.
3. They lack self-awareness or are emotionally tone-deaf — they are unable to understand how people perceive them.
4. They have an out-of-proportion reaction to a conversation or the situation at hand.
5. They don't recognize the inappropriateness of their facial expressions, tone of voice, or timing in bringing up certain things.
6. They tend not to own any of their parts of a conflict, always saying, “but you ...” in response.
7. More times than not, they lack empathy in situations and do not consider how their choices will affect the other person.
8. They are unwilling to honor or respect any communicated boundaries.
9. They do not take responsibility for themselves or their actions and expect you to pick up the pieces.
10. They refuse to acknowledge how unhealed trauma from their past, possibly even their childhood, needs to be worked out so it's not acted out.
11. They rewrite history to prove a point that serves only them or their version of the truth.

12. Their version of reality is not consistent with facts. Their version of the truth is what protects them, and they really can't discern what is and is not deception.
13. They let their emotions get the best of them and sabotage what otherwise should have been a beautiful moment.
14. Instead of acknowledging or confessing wrongdoing, they sweep it under the rug and hope they're not caught.
15. They bring things into your environment that make you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or threatened. It could be drinking, smoking, using offensive language, or listening to or watching inappropriate music or movies. It could be gossiping, judging, or being overly aggressive about someone's political, social and religious views or conspiracy theories.

If you read through this list and are experiencing these behaviors in a relationship in your life, I want to tell you three things: 1) I am so sorry, and 2) I believe you and 3) you are not crazy.

I also know right about now, you could be feeling overwhelmed. I understand that. You're processing hard things. While this list may be causing your wheels to spin about some changes that might need to be made, you don't have to make drastic changes right now. In fact, I highly recommend processing this with a licensed professional counselor or trusted mentor.

As you continue to process this, I didn't just want to give you the *facts* about what red flags are. I also wanted you to have space to work through the *feelings* you may be experiencing personally in light of these dysfunctions.

Consider the following questions to help you think through how these dynamics may be affecting you:

1. When you tell others about your relationship, do you find yourself exaggerating the small "good things" and suppressing the hard/bad things?
2. Are you experiencing abuse but afraid to call it that? (If the answer is yes, seek help immediately from a trained professional.)
3. Do you ever discern that the other person is lying to you but when you ask them questions, they get defensive and angry? Do they then, in turn, make you feel like the crazy one?
4. When you see a call or a text from them, do you fear they are about to hijack your peace and send you spiraling emotionally?
5. Are you in love with their potential instead of who they are right now?
6. In conflict with this person, do you often have to take responsibility for everything while they resist taking responsibility for anything?
7. Do you question your worth or your sanity after you have spent time with this person?

8. Are you constantly walking on eggshells because you're afraid that one bad decision on your part will make the other person walk away? Or worse, you fear they will forever hold that one thing against you and use that instance as a justification to do whatever, or say whatever, they please?
9. Do you feel unable to share exciting successes in your life with this person for fear of them not celebrating you, or worse, attacking or belittling you?
10. Do you spend more time trying to save the relationship than enjoying the relationship?
11. Do you fear their choices?
12. Are they resistant to changing a behavior even though they know it is hurting you?
13. Are you suffering more than they are because of what they do?
14. What do the wise people in your life, who love you, are invested in your life, and have a good track record of giving helpful advice, have to say about this relationship?
15. Are you willing to listen to those people, or do you provide excuses about why they are wrong?
16. Are you proud to be with this person? And even more, are they respectful and proud to be with you?
17. Does the level of love you experience from this person seem to rise and fall based on what you do and don't do for them?

Please know: None of these questions are meant to shame or place blame on another person, and we shouldn't weaponize either of these lists against someone else. The purpose of this is to begin recognizing and naming some potential areas of concern for ourselves.

LET'S PAUSE AND CHECK IN WITH OUR HEARTS:

- What feelings have stirred up in you since discovering these red flags?
- As you read through this resource, was anything confirmed for you about the dynamics of a relationship you're in?
- What do you need from the Lord in order to make decisions moving forward?

NOW, LET'S PRAY TOGETHER AND ASK GOD FOR WISDOM:

Lord, one of the greatest desires of my heart is to love and treasure others the way You treasure us. But honestly, sometimes hard relationship dynamics make it incredibly difficult to pursue closeness. So I'm asking that You guide me and help me to walk in Your ways, not mine (Isaiah 55:8-9). Give me spiritual wisdom (James 1:5). Help me keep my own heart pure (Psalm 23:3). Show me how to approach my closest relationships with both compassion (Ephesians 4:32) and a healthy commitment to reality so I am in alignment with You and the kind of relationships You long for me to live in (1 Peter 5:8). I trust You to lead me with clarity in the right direction (Proverbs 3:5-6). I thank You for everything You're revealing to me personally right now. In Jesus' name, amen.

Resources To Help You Know Where to Go From Here

It isn't unloving to set a boundary, and it isn't unchristian to sometimes have to say a goodbye. Because boundaries aren't just a good idea ... They're God's idea. And God designed love to draw people together, not tear them apart. Determine the appropriate amount of personal and emotional access someone has to you based on how responsible they'll be with that access with the help of my new book, ***Good Boundaries and Goodbyes: Loving Others Without Losing the Best of Who You Are***. Get your copy today so we can continue making progress together. Purchase here!

I know this topic is so important and can be hard to navigate alone. That's why I dedicated an entire season to talk about relationships on the *Therapy & Theology* podcast with my friends Dr. Joel Muddamalle and Jim Cress. Listen to the first episode called "Is This Relationship Toxic?" here.

Ready to take a personal next step in finding a Christian counselor? The American Association of Christian Counselors is a great place to find the right fit for you and your circumstances. Visit www.aacc.net today!