

DOMESTIC ABUSE RESOURCE

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Isolation does not always sound like “you are not allowed to see them.” Sometimes contact becomes so exhausting, conflict-filled or difficult that the person eventually withdraws on their own.

■ WHAT IT IS

Social isolation is a pattern of separating a person from the people, places, work, culture and communities that provide support, perspective and independence. It is often gradual and may be disguised as love, jealousy or wanting more time together.

LOOK FOR THE PATTERN

Look at what has happened to the person’s world over time. Has the support network become smaller? Is seeing other people increasingly costly? Does one relationship now control access to almost every other source of connection and perspective?

■ THREE SIGNALS WORTH NOTICING

REPEATS

It keeps happening.

ESCALATES

The impact or consequences grow.

RESTRICTS

Freedom, safety or choice gets smaller.

A single incident can be confusing. Repetition, escalation and reduced freedom are often what make the wider pattern easier to see.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

One incident can be confusing. The pattern shows what life is becoming.

CONTINUE → WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

RECOGNIZE THE BEHAVIOR

WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

These examples are not a checklist or a diagnosis. The context matters: frequency, fear, consequences, escalation and whether one person is losing ordinary freedom or choice.

- Criticizing or insulting friends, family, coworkers, faith communities or support networks.
- Monitoring calls and messages or insisting on being included in every conversation.
- Creating arguments before or after social contact so seeing other people no longer feels worth the consequences.
- Accusing a partner of cheating, disloyalty or betrayal for spending time with others.
- Making someone cancel plans, leave events early, move away or spend nearly all free time together.
- Telling other people the partner is unstable, dishonest or dangerous so they pull away.
- Controlling transportation, childcare, money or schedules so outside relationships are difficult to maintain.
- Undermining work, hobbies, community involvement, cultural ties or independent interests.

■ READ THE BEHAVIOR IN CONTEXT

ONE EVENT

Ask what happened in that moment and whether there was fear, force, pressure or intimidation.

THE PATTERN

Then ask what has been happening across weeks or months, especially when the other person resists or says no.

The useful question is not only “Did this happen?” It is “What does this behavior do to the other person over time?”

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Context matters. Notice what happens when a boundary is set.

CONTINUE → PATTERNS TO NOTICE

SEE THE WHOLE PICTURE

PATTERNS TO NOTICE

Patterns are often easier to recognize when you stop judging each incident separately. Look at what repeats, what escalates, what creates fear and what choices are gradually disappearing.

■ You feel anxious before seeing friends or family because you anticipate consequences afterward.	■ Work, hobbies, community involvement or cultural connections slowly disappear.
■ Other people stop inviting you because plans repeatedly become difficult or are canceled.	■ You have stopped telling people what is happening because explaining it feels embarrassing or exhausting.
■ You increasingly depend on the controlling person for transport, money, information or emotional support.	■ You begin to believe you have “no one else,” even though that was not true earlier in the relationship.

■ WHY IT MATTERS

Isolation removes witnesses, practical help and alternative perspectives. That can make other forms of abuse easier to maintain because the isolated person has fewer opportunities to reality-check what is happening or access support.

MYTH “They just love me and want us to spend all our time together.”	REALITY Healthy closeness does not require one person to give up independent relationships, work, interests, privacy or community.
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Healthy relationships can include conflict, mistakes and disagreement. The concern is a repeated pattern that creates fear, removes autonomy or changes behavior through pressure or control.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Look at the pattern: what repeats, escalates or changes behavior?

CONTINUE → CASE STUDY & PRACTICAL STEPS

ANONYMOUS COMPOSITE EXAMPLE

CASE STUDY

This composite combines common patterns and is written to protect privacy. It is not presented as one identifiable person or investigation.

A person was never directly told they could not see family or friends. Instead, every visit triggered a problem. Their partner complained that friends were disrespectful, became cold before social events and started arguments when the person returned home. Going out alone brought repeated messages and later accusations that other people mattered more than the relationship. Eventually, the person declined invitations because staying home was easier than dealing with the fallout. Months later, they realized they were speaking to almost no one privately and had stopped doing activities they once enjoyed.

■ WHAT TO NOTICE



Isolation can be created through consequences and conflict even when no explicit rule says “you cannot go.”



Notice whether one partner is gradually losing private contact with friends, family, coworkers or support networks.



When peace in the relationship depends on becoming more isolated, the pattern matters.

■ IF THIS IS HAPPENING

- Reconnect carefully with one trusted person rather than feeling you must rebuild your entire network at once.
- Use a safer communication method if you believe calls, messages or accounts are being monitored.
- Tell someone specifically what has been happening instead of only saying the relationship is “difficult.”
- If possible, maintain independent access to transportation, important documents, money and professional contacts.
- If reconnecting or leaving may increase risk, consider safety planning with a qualified domestic violence professional.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

You do not need to explain away every incident before you are allowed to take a pattern seriously. Notice what repeats, what changes your behavior, and what happens when you set a boundary.