NVR 2 L8

Noticing Differences, A Resource for Supporters

This resource was created to offer insight into oddities, nuances or slight shifts in the behavior and words of a loved one experiencing emotional or psychological abuse.

When engaging with a loved one that is in an emotionally abusive relationship, yellow and red flags might appear very quickly. In the beginning, stories shared are filled with giddy excitement about how comfortable the relationship feels even though it's new. There might be a passing comment about hearing "I love you" almost immediately. Then there might be talk about marriage being on the table, already.

Soon though, the conversations change, the tone changes and they feel different. There is a visible shift from giddy excitement to confusion when the declarations of love are followed by unreturned calls or texts. A story might be shared about their new love requesting something, only to be told after completing the request, it was done completely wrong. There also might be a mention, in passing, that "I had to pay because they forgot their credit card."

As a trusted, outside observer, quiet contradictions and patterns begin to emerge. What was once excitement that a loved one found "their one" shifts into caution, revealing yellow and even red flags. Hearing about deep professions of love while weekends are spent apart seems odd … yellow flag? Hearing that every trip or visit falls entirely on their shoulders, that's a lot of miles … normal? Listening as repeated instances of "left my wallet" or "forgot my credit card" seem constant, how much money is being spent … red flag?

The natural instinct, when noticing the shifts in conversation and the patterns, is to share observations, ask pointed questions or voice concerns out of love. In this dynamic, reacting in any questioning way, carries real risk. When an abuser senses or perceives outside intrusion, that perception, whether valid or not, is frequently used against the loved one. It becomes a perfect excuse for the abuser to paint a vivid picture that caring friends and family are unsupportive, untrustworthy or "don't like me," and this begins the quiet and methodical process of isolation.

Holding a safe, judgment-free space for them becomes an essential lifeline. Listening without questioning allows a loved one to share their reality, without feeling the need to defend their actions. When conversations remain calm, open and steady, the support lifeline stays intact - ensuring there will always be a sanctuary when escape is needed.