

## **“First Aid” for Jealousy: Know Your Jealousy Pie Chart**

from *The Jealousy Workbook* by Kathy Labriola, Counselor/Nurse,

### **Introduction: What are you experiencing when you are jealous?**

#### **Jealousy can include any or all of the following:**

anger and rage  
fear and even terror,  
betrayal  
anxiety or panic  
physical, mental, and/or emotional agitation  
obsessive thoughts  
sadness and hurt,  
exaggerated or catastrophic worries,  
depression or sadness,  
loneliness,  
envy,  
coveting,  
self-loathing,  
powerlessness,  
feeling left out or excluded  
embarrassment and humiliation  
grief and loss  
fears of inadequacy  
feeling numb  
fatigue  
confusion and disorientation  
memory loss and difficulty concentrating  
feeling disrespected or mistreated  
difficulty sleeping  
stomach cramps, nausea, vomiting, and/or diarrhea  
heart palpitations or pounding heartbeat  
shortness of breath or feelings of suffocation  
muscle aches and pains  
flu-like symptoms  
dizziness and fainting  
being flooded with repetitive, painful memories  
compulsive behaviors

**Is it from the current situation or from the past?** Any of these feelings, thoughts, or experiences can be intensified by past experiences which may be triggering your jealousy, whether or not those past experiences involved a romantic relationship. These experiences may be from childhood, such as feeling abandoned by a parent due to divorce, being neglected by a parent due to a parent's alcoholism or being self-absorbed, having a close friend move away and feeling alone, or feeling left out or inadequate due to a sibling getting more attention or being more successful in some way. Or a jealousy experience can be triggered by a more recent event in adulthood, such as a former lover leaving you for someone else, or being neglected by a former partner because of their involvement in their career or

their commitment to other partners. I have worked with clients who were suddenly flooded with jealous feelings, thoughts, and sensations due to a wide variety of non-relationship events: feeling outraged at being fired from a job despite hard work and talent, or devastated by the death of a parent who left more money to a sibling in their Will, or filled with envy when a band-mate gets a solo recording contract. All these experiences will tend to “sensitize” an individual to jealousy and future circumstances may create a “post-traumatic stress” type reaction.

### **Fear, Anger, and Sadness: The Three Primary Jealousy Symptoms**

To better understand your jealousy, start with identifying your most prominent and consistent jealous feelings. The three primary negative emotions are fear, anger, and sadness, or at their most extreme, terror, rage, and despair. While there are literally hundreds of feelings in the human arsenal, most painful feelings fit into one of those three broader categories. Most people experience some combination of fear, anger, and sadness when they have an intense jealousy reaction, but one of those three primary emotions is usually more prominent.

Some research indicates that women are more likely to identify fear or sadness as the predominant emotions of jealousy, but men are much more likely to experience anger when they feel jealous. Evolutionary biologist David Bussey writes that men are physiologically wired for angry responses to jealousy. He theorized that in the ancient past, this anger had a survival benefit in scaring away rival males and keeping his mate from defecting to another man. Bussey also believes that jealous anger in women did not create a positive outcome, so women evolved a different adaptation to jealousy. However, my personal and professional experience clearly shows this same pattern.

Regardless of the cause or effect, you can make your jealousy more manageable by recognizing which of these three is most important for you, and zeroing in on problem-solving strategies specific to that emotion. Try this exercise to identify the percentages of these three primary negative emotions in your personal jealousy profile.

#### **Pie chart exercise Exercise 1: Draw your jealousy pie chart**

- 1) Take a piece of paper and draw a large circle, a pie chart.
- 2) Remember the last time you experienced intense jealousy.
- 3) Imagine that your jealousy is inside this circle or pie chart, and ask yourself whether you were feeling more fear, anger, or sadness while you were jealous. If you have trouble differentiating between these primary emotions, look over the list above of all that jealousy can include, and try to identify which things on that list you are experiencing. Then take those feelings and try to determine whether they fall into the category of fear, anger, or sadness.
- 4) Write inside the circle on the left side the name of whichever of those three emotions was most intense, and make your best guess about what percentage of the pie chart that emotion filled up.
- 5) Think about the other two primary emotions, and write each one of them inside the circle with the percentage of the jealousy pie chart that they occupy for you.
- 6) The percentages should add up to approximately 100%. If they don't, you could benefit from going over the pie chart again and seeing if there is some part that you have overlooked. If the percentages add up to more than 100%, that probably means that all three emotions feel quite intense for you. In that case, it can be useful to think about all three and try to determine if any one of them is more painful or bigger than the other two.

**A general example:** A woman who drew this pie chart remembered that whenever she was jealous, her

jealousy was 50% fear, and 20% anger,. She couldn't quite figure out what was in the other 30%. After studying the list above, she identified the rest of her jealousy as 10% feeling powerless, 15% feeling betrayed by her partner, and 5% feeling lonely and isolated. Feeling powerless and lonely fall into the realm of sadness, so she wrote “Sadness: 20%” in the pie chart, and her feelings of betrayal were angry feelings, so she added that 15% to the anger quotient in the circle. So her final pie chart showed 50% fear, 35% anger, and 15% sadness. This allowed her to focus primarily on her fears, which made up at least half of her jealousy, and then on her anger, which was the other big piece of the jealousy.

**Personal example:** When you think about a recent intense jealousy episode, you remember feeling enraged and even fantasizing about driving to your partner's other boyfriend's house and pounding on the door and screaming at him. You also remember feeling obsessed by fears that he may be better in bed than you, feelings of inferiority because he is more affluent and has been taking your partner to expensive restaurants. You worry that he might be looking down on you, and that your friends may be talking about you behind your back. You identify anger as the primary emotion you are feeling, and write in the pie chart: “Anger, 75%.” In looking at these other fears about his money and his sexual prowess, you write “Fear: 15%.” Thinking about your concerns about the public humiliation of him looking down on you or your loss of status in your friends' eyes, you notice feeling despair, and write in the pie chart: “Sadness: 10 %.”

## **Pie chart Exercise 2: How to Manage the Fear, Anger, and Sadness of Jealousy**

Now that you have an idea of the general percentages of fear, anger, and sadness that make up your jealousy, what can you do about it? Start with the one primary emotion that is the strongest and most distressing, and learn more about it, so you can develop better coping strategies.

### **Fear:**

**If you identified fear as the predominant emotion, with a higher percentage than anger or sadness, ask yourself these three questions and write down the answers:**

Question # 1: What am I afraid of? These are the six most likely suspects:

- 1) Fear of abandonment, that your partner will leave you for someone else
- 2) Fear of losing face and losing status in your community, if other people find out your partner is interested in someone else
- 3) Fear of betrayal because your partner is attracted to someone else
- 4) Competitiveness with other potential partners, and fears of being inadequate, sexually or in some other way
- 5) Envy towards your partner's other love interest, fearing that they are more attractive/charming/smart/successful/rich/etc than you are
- 6) Fear of scarcity and deprivation, fear that you will be lonely and unsatisfied because your partner will ignore you and pay attention to someone else instead.

In looking over this list of six fears, ask yourself, which one or ones are you most afraid of when you are experiencing a jealousy attack? Write them down in the order of importance, with the most painful and intense fear first.

Question # 2: How likely is it that my fear will come true? And even if the likelihood is slim, is there some kernel of truth in my fear? And if it does come true, how will I handle it?

Question # 3: What do I need to do to address this fear? What can I do to take care of myself, and what kind of support can I ask for from my partner, friends, and community, in order to resolve this fear?

### **A General Example:**

Question # 1: Whenever Jennifer's lover Peter had a date with his new partner Melanie, she feared he would find the new person more attractive and interesting and would end their long-term relationship. In examining her fears, this was her most intense, terrifying feeling during jealousy episodes, and she was obsessed with anxiety that she would be abandoned and alone.

Question # 2: She asked herself how likely this was to come true, and she remembered that Peter had had 3 other lovers in the past and hadn't left her, so it seemed unlikely that he would leave her for this one. She did find a kernel of truth in her fear because one previous outside relationship had caused so much conflict between them that they almost broke up over it. She realized that her fear of abandonment was coming from her memories of those painful arguments over this previous girlfriend, and how close they had come to breaking up. Since they had not had so much conflict over Melanie, and her partner was showing no signs of actually wanting to leave, she felt calmer and more secure about her relationship. And when she thought of how she could cope if in fact her worst fear did come true and he left her, she reminded herself that she had been single for two years before meeting Peter, and she was quite happy then, so that even if they did break up, she would survive it.

Question # 3: When she asked herself what she needed to handle this fear, she decided to ask Peter to limit his dates with Melanie to once or twice a week. He had been generally only seeing her once a week, but ironically Melanie had become very insecure about the relationship and had been asking for more time with Peter. Peter agreed that he would have one overnight date with Melanie and one lunch date during the week, when Jennifer was at work and would be too busy to obsess about them having a date. Peter also agreed not to email or text Melanie during his dates with Jennifer as that made her feel insulted. Instead he would text and email her a few times during the workday when it would not intrude on his time with Jennifer. Melanie would get enough contact with him but Jennifer would not be triggered with fears of abandonment. Jennifer also agreed to make dates with friends or get involved in some other activity on the one night a week that Peter would be with Melanie. This way she would be preoccupied with doing something fun, rather than sitting home alone feeling anxious and jealous.

### **Anger:**

**If you identified anger as the predominant emotion, with a higher percentage than fear or sadness, ask yourself these four questions and write down the answers:**

Question # 1: Who or what am I angry at? Am I angry at my partner, at my partner's other partner(s), at myself, at someone else altogether?

Question # 2: Is my anger based in the current situation, or is it being triggered by something in my past, or am I angry about something I fear is going to happen as a result of the current situation? Is there a rational basis for my anger, and if so, does the anger seem proportional to the situation? On a scale of 1 to 10, how angry do I feel about this situation? Is that number appropriate, and if not, what number would be reasonable? And even if my anger does not really seem justified, is there some valid reason I feel mistreated or disrespected?

Question # 3: What is the grievance that I want to redress? Being angry is usually a response to feeling that someone has not behaved appropriately in relation to us, or that something has occurred that is unfair or unethical. So it is useful to identify the specific action or experience that has made you feel

victimized in some way, and state as clearly as possible what you feel is “wrong” with this situation and what you believe would be the correct behavior or outcome.

Question # 4: What do I need to do to address, express, and/or let go of this anger? What can I do to take care of myself, and what kind of support can I ask for from my partner, friends, and community, in order to resolve this?

### **A General Example:**

Question # 1: Jamal and his wife Maria are both bisexual, she has a girlfriend and he has a boyfriend. Jamal made plans to go to his parents' house for dinner, but Maria accidentally scheduled that same evening to take their kids to the movies with her lover Raquel and Raquel's kids. Jamal was angry at Maria for carelessly double-booking the date and he felt very uncomfortable having to call his parents and cancel the dinner. His only other choice would have been to tell the kids they had to miss the movie and their fun plans, and that Maria had put him in the position of “being the bad guy.” So he was angry at both Maria and at the “no-win” situation. He was also furious at Raquel, even though he could not really explain why. He also felt angry at himself for letting Maria be in charge of the family's social calendar, telling himself that if he had been more on top of things, he could have prevented this.

Question #2: His anger at Maria was justified, because she could have prevented this scheduling conflict. He rated his anger towards her at 7 on a scale of 1 to 10. However, several times in the past, he had canceled dates with her at the last minute because his boyfriend had come into town unexpectedly, and Maria had been gracious about that. In thinking it over, he decided that being angry at about a 3 or 4 rather than a 7 would be more proportional to the situation. Maria had given him enough advance notice of the snafu so that he was able to reschedule with his parents a week in advance, and they had not been inconvenienced. He realized that his anger at Raquel was not justified but that he was holding on to some anger towards her because she had recently offered to take care of their kids so they could go away for the weekend to celebrate their 15th wedding anniversary, but that she had not followed up on actually committing to a specific weekend.

Question # 3: Jamal decided that his grievance was that he felt Maria's behavior showed disregard for him and disrespect for his parents. In writing that down and then communicating it to Maria, he realized that she meant no disrespect and that it was simply an error due to the stress of keeping track of the kids' schedules, her work schedule, etc, rather than a deliberate insult. As a result, he was able to let go of that part of the anger. His other grievance was that he now felt distrustful of Maria's ability to juggle her marriage and her relationship with Raquel.

Question # 4: He asked Maria for reassurance that she would be more careful with scheduling in the future, and Maria promised to check with him before committing to weekend dates with Raquel that could interfere with family events. Jamal's boyfriend suggested that they use a version of an on-line Google calendar that he and his wife were successfully using, to track their family plans, individual work schedules, and outside dates, and so they agreed to try that.

### **Sadness:**

**If you identified sadness as the predominant emotion, with a higher percentage than fear or anger, ask yourself these four questions and write down the answers:**

Question # 1: What are the sad emotions I am experiencing: feelings of depression, insecurity, inadequacy, self-loathing, boredom, loneliness, hurt, loss, grief, overwhelmed, exhaustion, feeling debilitated, abandonment?

Question # 2: What am I sad about? Is it a specific behavior of my partner that seems to have triggered this sadness, or simply the fact that they are having another relationship, or that they are attracted to someone else? What is it about this that seems to create sadness for me?

Question # 3: Is my sadness based in the current situation, or being triggered by something in the past? Is there a rational basis for these sad feelings, and if so, does it seem proportional to the situation? On a scale of 1 to 10, how sad do I feel about this situation? Is that number appropriate, and if not, what number would be reasonable? And even if my sadness seems irrational, is there some valid reason I feel unhappy about this? What exactly is “wrong” with this situation and what do I believe is the appropriate alternative or outcome?

Question # 4: What do I need to do to address, express, and/or let go of this sadness? What can I do to take care of myself, and what kind of support from my partner, friends, and community would be helpful?

**Example:**

Question # 1: Cathy's had lived with her partner Janna for 10 years before they decided to explore an open relationship. But when Janna began a new relationship, Cathy was overwhelmed with depression and could not stop crying whenever she thought about it or whenever Janna had a date. When Cathy examined her intense feelings of sadness she realized that she felt an overwhelming sense of loss.

Question #2: When asked why she felt such mourning, she was able to see that the end of the sexual and romantic exclusivity in her relationship felt like an irrevocable loss, which she described as “an earth-shattering change in the relationship” which filled her with sadness. Suddenly everything else about the relationship felt “up for grabs,” as if the security of the relationship was in jeopardy. She felt as if she was about to lose everything that mattered to her, including losing her partner. And she found herself mourning the natural cooling off of intense passion in her relationship over the years, as she could see the contrast between this and the New Relationship Energy (NRE) Janna was experiencing in the new relationship.

Question #3: In looking at her past, she could see that her sadness was being triggered not only by Janna's new romance but by a past experience of a former girlfriend leaving her for another woman. She knew she was projecting some of her pain from that past break-up onto Janna, when in fact the two situations were not similar at all. On a scale of 1 to 10, she rated her sadness at an 8, but could see that a more appropriate number was about a 5. She realized that she missed having more passion and romance with Janna. Seeing Janna getting dressed up and planning special dates with her new girlfriend made her envious and feel left out, and she asked Janna to plan some exciting dates with her as well.

Question #4: Cathy and Janna started having weekly date nights and going out to hear bands at clubs, something they loved doing when they first started dating. They also began writing each other sexy emails and texts, which helped Cathy feel she was receiving romantic attention and feeling more loved and desired. And they had a few long talks acknowledging that the end of sexual exclusivity was in fact a much bigger loss than either of them had anticipated. However, they both felt that the positive gains from having an open relationship would compensate for this loss and add up to a net gain overall. Her sadness gradually subsided to a 2 or 3, which was much more manageable.