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SULKING IN A RELATIONSHIP

Valentine's Day is the day of the year when symbols of love can be seen everywhere. Almost everyone is focused on celebrating this special feeling and appreciating only the good moments of being together. However, a relationship is also about conflicts, which everyone deals with in their own way. Today we will address passive aggression in a partner relationship, namely the 'silent days'.

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

In general, aggression is always aimed at **causing harm to another person**. Sometimes these are actions that we cannot see, they hide behind our backs, they are so subtle that we do not know whether we are not telling ourselves something. Other times we are harmed by... someone's failure to make a decision. This is what passive aggression is all about: it involves deliberate refraining from spontaneous behaviour and typical reactions, and deliberate resistance to expectations and commitments.

EXAMPLES OF PASSIVE AGGRESSION

Passive aggressive can take many different forms, but the most common manifestations are:

- The already mentioned 'silent days', i.e. deliberate ignorance, silence, avoidance of any contact.
- Not answering phone calls, text messages.
- Withdrawal of interest – pretending that the partner is not interested in a particular topic and seeking information from others.
- Notorious lying, cheating, deliberate misrepresentation.
- Acting to the disadvantage of the other person and, when confronted, making all kinds of excuses like ignorance or good intentions.
- Badmouthing your partner or talking about them as if they were absent.
- Being late, changing plans at the last minute, avoiding.
- Exclusion from jointly planned activities.

And what does passive aggression sound like? It can lurk in statements such as:

- „A delicious dish for someone who cannot cook“.
- „Well, you asked me to tidy up the flat, not to vacuum it like it's a national holiday“.
- „Tell everyone, dear, how you parked last time and then I had to go to a car painter“.
- „Oh, didn't you know they postponed my exam for today?“
- „I decided it was better if I did it myself“.
- „Some people get promoted because they are educated and intelligent, but you with such beauty will definitely find something too“.
- „Do understand that I didn't come to the appointed dinner because I couldn't refuse my boss a tennis match“.

This type of aggression works insidiously, at first we may not realise it and even make excuses for our partner. However, over time we will begin to feel the impact of aggression more and more acutely. Negative emotions, stress, lack of support, feelings of hopelessness and even developing depression are just some of its effects.



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When dealing with passive aggression, assertive communication skills can be useful. We recommend Marshall Rosenberg's book *Nonviolent Communication*.

WHY DO WE USE PASSIVE AGGRESSION?

There are many reasons for this behaviour and they are quite complex. Individual manifestations of passive aggression happen to everyone as a response to excessive emotional strain. The problem arises when they are notorious and deliberate. Why do people use passive aggression in relationships?

- They unconsciously reproduce patterns from the family home.
- They are unable to be assertive, to speak directly about their feelings and needs.
- Passive aggression is not associated with open negative social sanctions.
- It provides an opportunity for silent retaliation and not taking responsibility for one's behaviour.
- It is a response to a sense of undermined independence („No one is going to tell me what to do”).
- When such behaviour is notorious and involves multiple areas, it may indicate a personality disorder.

WHEN I USE PASSIVE AGGRESSION...

If you suspect that you are (even unconsciously) using passive-aggressive behaviour, try to make some changes. First of all, make an attempt to recognise and name the emotions you feel in moments of frustration. Once you have done this, try to:

- Speak an assertive message: „It makes me angry when (describe specific behaviour here)”.
- Ask, instead of taking offence, for example: „I need a moment to cool down”, „Let's talk about it later”.
- Give vent to your aggression in a safe way, for example you could shout in the woods, hit a soft object, undertake physical activity to reduce the tension you feel.

When you meet someone who is passive aggressive...

When you are a victim of passive aggression, the most important step is to name what you are seeing or experiencing. Confronting the aggressor with our emotions can help them to recognise the unconstructive behaviour. However, if this is not the case, it is worth learning how to set clear boundaries.

Make it clear that you do not want any biting remarks. Express your opposition to unwanted behaviour. Also remember not to get provoked. When you don't know how to deal with the passive aggression you are experiencing, consider consulting it with a professional who can help you develop an assertive attitude.

Partner relationships can be quite complicated. When you feel that your partner is using passive aggression, it is worth reacting as soon as possible. The ability to assertively set boundaries is also useful.

Don't wait, call now! If you are struggling with passive aggression, talk to a specialist who can help you out in the situation. We are here to support you!