

## WHAT IS EMOTIONAL MANIPULATION?

*Hi. This is Natalie Hoffman of [FlyingFreeNow.com](http://FlyingFreeNow.com), and you're listening to the Flying Free Podcast, a support resource for women of faith looking for hope and healing from hidden emotional and spiritual abuse.*

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 87 of the Flying Free Podcast!

Today I want to answer a question that I hear all the time:

"How do you answer your husband when he says, 'Just tell me what I need to do to fix this?'"

First of all, you need to know why he is asking that question. And to understand why he's asking that question, we need to use an analogy.

Let's say you are in a room with him and he is sitting on a chair next to you, kicking you in the shin every so often. You ask him to stop, and he responds to you by:

- Sometimes ignoring you.
- Sometimes saying, "What's the big deal? I'm hardly doing anything."
- Sometimes saying, "I'm not kicking you in the shin. Where are you getting that crazy idea from?"
- Sometimes laughing and saying, "You can't ever take a joke."
- Sometimes yelling at you and saying, "You're such a nag! What is your problem! You're on my case all the time. I can't do ANYTHING without hearing you gripe and complain!"

And the kicking continues for twenty years.

At the end of twenty years, you decide to stand up and leave the room. You say, "I'm sick of you kicking me in the shin. You don't think there's anything wrong with it, so that tells me you're going to keep doing it. Since you won't stop, I'm leaving."

And his response to you is, "HOW CAN I FIX THIS?"

Do you see it? Now do you see the reason he is asking you that question?

You see, your brain really wants to believe he is asking that question because he genuinely has no clue that he's been kicking you. And you would be a nasty old meanie not to tell him and give him a chance. Right? I mean, everyone deserves a chance!

Your brain wants to believe that because it's been programmed with that thought your entire life. If someone asks a question, it must be genuine, and you must answer or you're being rude.

But is that true? Is that programmed thought always true? In this case, it's not. If you continue to believe that thought, you'll feel guilty when you don't answer and walk away. When you feel guilty, you'll overwork, overcompensate, and overeat. You'll also deny it's that bad and minimize the kicks. And you'll stay in the room with your kicker.

But what if you offered your brain a different thought? What if you thought this instead: "That's an interesting question he is asking. Interesting because I've told him for twenty years what's wrong. And I'm pretty sure he has good hearing and brain tissue. That means his question isn't genuine. It's a challenge to keep me in his little game, and I'm not playing anymore."

Now THAT thought causes you to feel clear and empowered. And when you feel clear and empowered, you say, "I've already told you what to do and then I gave you twenty years to do it. Goodbye." And you leave. What is the result in your life? You no longer get kicked in the shin every day.

I hope that analogy helps a bit. But let's take it back to real life, because some of you are thinking, "I still don't get it. He seems to genuinely want to work on his stuff for the first time ever! I don't want to throw away this amazing opportunity if he finally wants to change!"

And you don't have to. You absolutely don't have to. But here's what I suggest you do.

First, find out if he knows what he needs to fix. His programming doesn't believe he's done anything wrong that needs fixing. Because if you think about it, if a bike is broken, would he ask that question? "What do I need to do to fix this?" He could answer that question all by himself: "I need to look up my bike's problem on YouTube, watch a video, get some tools, and fix it." And he would. So if he doesn't know what needs to be fixed, his question isn't genuine. Now if he says, "I know I've not taken responsibility for my behavior in the marriage, and I've put it on you instead. I don't want to do that anymore. I'm going to fix MY BEHAVIOR. Here are some behaviors you've asked me to fix in the past. And I'm wondering if there are any other behaviors I need to work on as well?"

Now, THAT's a beginning. It doesn't mean anything yet, but at least he is demonstrating that he has some self-awareness on his own. This would be like him kicking you for

twenty years and then stopping suddenly and saying, "I kick you all the time. I shouldn't do that. I'm going to stop. Is there anything else I do that bothers you?"

Here's the thing: if we answer that question for them (and we already have for twenty years, remember?), we don't give them a chance to show that they understand or have insight or self-awareness on their own. And if they don't have it and they are unwilling to search for it, then it doesn't matter what you tell them. They will do one of two things with the information you give them:

1. They will jump through your hoops and make the aesthetic changes "you are demanding" ("Oh, she's so demanding. She wants me to stop kicking her in the shins. Picky, picky woman, but whatever.") in order to maintain control over you. But it won't last because it isn't real.
2. They will turn it back onto you again and say it's your problem and your fault and challenge YOU to take responsibility again and "fix it."

What they will NOT do (generally speaking) is go out on their OWN initiative and get some therapy and read the books and figure out what they are doing wrong (you've told them a million times, right?) and work on themselves and their own behavior. They won't do it because they can't. They live in an alternate reality where you are a Lego character in their universe. You're not allowed to be YOU. In full color. In flesh and blood with your own ideas, experiences, perceptions, opinions, etc.

So how do you answer? "I've already told you over the course of many years. I'm not going to insult your intelligence by going over it again. Get therapy. Google. Read books. Get help for yourself. I'm not taking responsibility for your behavior anymore. Just my own. We are both grownups now. Let's both start acting like one."

I was just talking to Patrick Doyle the other day, and he said, "The salesman's job starts when the customer says 'no.'"

Your man is a salesman. And do you know what he's selling? A seat next to him so he can keep kicking you in the shins.

Now, if you're kicking yourself right now because you think you're a fool for staying so long, DON'T. That's not helpful to you. And that's not going to give you the motivation, courage, and self-confidence to get out of that room. Besides, it isn't YOU that wanted to stay. It was your brain's programming. Your brain has been recording all the things you've been taking in through your senses since you were a baby, and then your brain

took all that data and turned it into a program, or manual, for your life. Most of your decisions and behavior throughout your life have been made unconsciously based on your brain's programming.

Your challenge is to learn how to reveal your programming and then decide whether or not you like it and want to keep it or not. This is the work we do in Flying Higher.

So what DO YOU do when your husband says, "How Can I Fix This?"

You need to let go of your need to control him. You don't have to control his behavior. You shouldn't. It's crossing over into his boundaries to try to control his behavior. He gets to kick you if he wants to, okay?

You can't control his lack of initiative. He could take initiative and stand up and go, "I'm going to stop now. I'm done with this. I'm done being like this." He could do that. You can't control whether or not he does that, though.

You can't control the way he shows up as a parent or the way he shows up in his workplace or the way he shows up at church.

You aren't his mommy or his fixer-upper or his Holy Spirit. He's a grown-ass man. If he wants to figure out how to stop kicking his wife in the shin, he can do it. And if he chooses not to for whatever reason, and they're his own reasons and he can have his own reasons, that's his choice, and he gets to make it for his life.

But here's number two: you also get to take back control of your life, okay? You get to take back control of what you do and how you think and what you say and who you are as a person.

How do YOU want to show up for yourself? For your life? Do you want to be in a room with a shin kicker, or are there other options? If so, what are they? Start to explore them. Ask yourself if you'd like to have a different result in your life.

The last thing you'll need to do is tolerate the disapproval you'll get (because these guys really need a shin to kick) by allowing uncomfortable feelings. You see, your man isn't the only shin kicker in the universe. And when you leave his room, you'll discover that many other rooms in your life have a shin kicker in them. You'll begin to recognize the shin kickers in time to leave the room before they can kick your shin, and you'll also discover that some shin kickers are going to chase you down because they really believe that a woman's place is in a chair next to a shin kicker.

And when you say "NO," they are going to be pig-biting mad.

So what are you going to do? Try to make all the shin kickers happy? Or are you going to go out and live your badass life? I hope it's the latter.

Thanks for listening, and until next time, fly free.