

Jealousy 101

Managing Emotional Distress in Polyamory

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What's Up With Jealousy?!

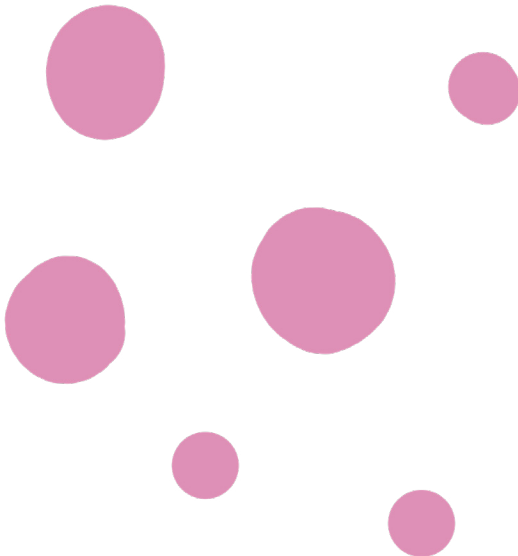
I've found the hardest part of starting ENM is being able to say "I'm jealous and that's ok." Many people who are first opening up seem to believe that they can simply will themselves to not feel jealousy. This is impractical. We often think we aren't jealous until we're presented with the specific conditions that cause us to get those spicy feelings. Everyone gets jealous and normalizing that fact within yourself is super important to managing your jealousy. Recognize that you experience jealousy for a particular set of reasons and so do your pals, your metas, and everyone else. It's nothing to be embarrassed about. Let's get over the shame of jealousy so we can more effectively deal with it!

Jealousy is unfortunately not unique to ethical non-monogamy. We all deal with it! However, we must acknowledge that folks who are in consensually alternative relationship structures have more instances of being confronted with spicy feelings. Fine I'll say it: ENM makes us more jealous. Blame it on society, compulsory monogamy, our upbringings, insecurity, or whoever/ whatever else. End of the day, seeing our pals fuck, love, etc, with metas can create some pretty distressing situations (especially in the beginning). This activity sheet is meant to help you understand and deal with the spiciness in a way that helps deepen your relationships rather than destroying them. You don't necessarily have to be in a consensually alternative relationship structure to use this tool, but I will certainly use polyam and ENM frameworks and concepts as a foundation.

When you're in the middle of an intense jealousy episode it's REALLY hard to know what to do. Jealousy triggers our scariest emotions, insecurities, and stirs up a plethora of relational challenges. In the moment of overwhelming distress my only focus is on alleviating the negative emotions. That's what this Activity Sheet will be focused on teaching you to do! Once I'm out of my jealous mental state I can work on conflict resolution with my pals,

set better BAES, and talk through insecurities. But all that happens secondarily to resolving my immediate emotional distress. I'll be guiding y'all through some questions, reflections, and exercises that I use to calm down and return to a place where I'm able to process and think clearly.

I'm obviously not a therapist and the insights I'm sharing are what's worked for me personally. Solidifying jealousy management skills and making them actually work requires the help of trained professionals. I **HIGHLY** recommend a therapist or other mental health provider to support you in your growth (of course with the caveat that those folks should be familiar with ENM or polyam). As a teacher, I can explain to you the skills, but putting them into practice takes deliberate effort. Doing effective and long-lasting jealousy management work alone is really hard (if not impossible). My therapist, Amanda, helps me to unlearn trauma responses, address attachment fears, and work together through other psychological challenges. My therapy allows me to address the deeper issues that make jealousy skills difficult to implement otherwise. These worksheets are only meant to be tools, but successful management requires a variety of different approaches.



I've compiled skills and tips from several different sources and formulated them into workable models specifically for jealousy remediation in consensual alternative relationship structures. What's crucial to understand is that there's not one single trick that will help or be a perfect resource. It's unfortunately impossible to obliterate jealousy. Part of getting good at jealousy management is learning to become more familiar with it and coping in non-destructive ways. I encourage you to continue diving into these resources. They'll further expand your understanding and increase your mastery. Basically here's a few places I've learned jealousy skills:

1. THERAPY

I've worked with Amanda on a variety of cognitive behavioral therapy approaches. I find Dialectical Behavioral Therapy models provide me with the relief I need, and use versions of them all the time in jealousy management. DBT teaches distress tolerance, emotional management, mindfulness, and interpersonal communication. These are all skills that go to shit when we're experiencing jealousy. If you're interested in this method please consult with your therapist for guidance. Additionally, I recommend checking out *The Dialectical Behavioral Therapy Skills Workbook* by Matthew McKay, Jeffery Wood, and Jeffrey Brantley. I'll admit, it's a glaringly cis-white-male-hetero-monogamous perspective and meant for clinical application. I've taken some of the guiding principles and expanded them for ENM outside of a therapist's office. Again, I want to be clear that learning these skills alone will absolutely not replace a therapeutic relationship. Having professional guidance will make this easier. My intention in using this framework is not to provide mental health guidance, but simply to explain how the distress tolerance, emotional management, mindfulness, and interpersonal communication tools can all be used for jealousy management.

2. REFLECTION TOOLS

I really like workbooks because they teach in dynamic and personally relevant ways. That's a large part of the reason I create so many activity sheets! I love workbooks. If you're unfamiliar with them try the one mentioned above, *The Jealousy Workbook* by Kathy Labriola, *The Codependency Workbook* by Krystal Mazzola, *The Big Activity Book for Anxious People* by Jordan Reid and Erin Williams to get started. All of these resources allow me to write and reflect as I go. I use them all the time and leave them all over my house and studio. Part of jealousy management for me is having accessible tools when I'm struggling to come up with answers on my own. I make a practice of flipping through them every morning over coffee so that when I'm dealing with a hot situation throughout the day, it doesn't take that extra effort to even remember they exist. I also like keeping journals and random notes on my phone. I encourage you to do the same. It's useful to have a place where you can be deliberate about your reflections -- they will help your growth.

3. HEALING ART

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, I taught healing art to children at OHSU hospital through a non-profit organization. While there, I realized that I didn't want to be an art therapist (that's what I'd been studying to do), but that art was an incredible tool that isn't taken seriously enough. At the hospital I worked with kiddos as young as 2 all the way to adults. I saw first hand how the efficacy of art could be applied regardless of age. I worked with children undergoing medical treatment and families dealing with the incredible stress of their situation. It was a really difficult population to work with, but I also saw the tremendous capacity for emotional resilience that exists somewhere in all of us. Especially for younger children who were mostly non-verbal or weren't fully aware of their situation, art was the gift that allowed emotional release in a positive way. That job showed me concretely how we can heal ourselves through creative practice, and it's become a foundation for my jealousy management practice.

Jealousy is a BITCH framework:

BREATHE

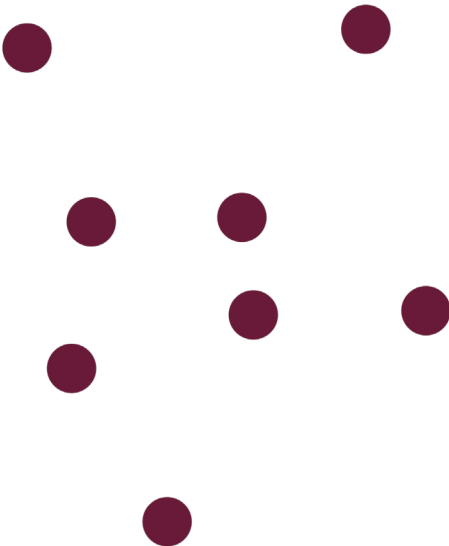
IDENTIFY INTEGRITY

TEAMWORK

CHILL THE FUCK OUT

HINDSIGHT DEBRIEF

This framework is meant to give you the foundations for dealing with spicy emotions that commonly occur in polyamory. The BITCH acronym is meant to give you a process for dealing with jealousy while reminding you that sometimes jealousy really is just a bitch and there's nothing much else to do but sit and wait it out. After all, at it's core, jealousy is simply a set of unpleasant emotions but none of them will last forever.



Part 1:

Breathe

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BREATHE

The first skill you need to learn for jealousy management is how to breathe. Breathing alone obviously won't resolve your jealousy. But, if you're anything like me, experiencing jealousy induces panic. Panicking makes everything so much worse and it's a really hard pattern to change. When you're experiencing jealousy a lot of negative emotions are triggered, often activating your fight/flight/freeze instincts. Your body doesn't actually know what's happening and doesn't know the appropriate way to react to your pal seeing someone else. Your body is doing its best and offers you the only options it believes to be helpful. It also explains why it's common for pals to lash out or "bite" their partners, for them to literally run away, or to emotionally shut down from their pals. Unfortunately fighting, flighting, or freezing are garbage options when trying to solve interpersonal issues. Part of what makes polyam tricky is that none of us were taught proper relationship education. So many of us are unsure of what to do other than listen to our emotional instincts. A clear mind and calm body is far more productive at navigating jealousy. Your mind is foggy as fuck when it's being pumped with chemicals that are telling it to bite, run, or shut down. While those can often seem like the easiest things to do, I promise that will not resolve the issue. Take some time to reflect on how your fight/flight/freeze response shows up in your attachment style. Learning to recognize when you're panicking gives you the power to exert your mind over a body that's being completely unhelpful. I break down my first jealousy management activities into three parts:

- 1. RECOGNIZE & REMOVE**
- 2. DISTRACT & DEESCALATE**
- 3. SOOTHE & SLOW DOWN**

Here are the steps I take to calm my body down and allow my mind to do the work:

Recognize & Remove

The first task is to recognize when I'm panicking/when my jealousy is triggered. I usually notice it in my hands as a hot prickly feeling followed by clammy palms. I also get a hot feeling in my ears. When I can see jealousy and name it, I realize I'm able to do something about it. This takes time and you'll get better at recognizing jealousy the more often you experience it. Don't be embarrassed to say "that's jealousy." Honestly, I think it's awesome to get to a point where you can say out loud "I'm experiencing jealousy." By drawing attention to our body, we can learn to focus on what the emotions feel like. Physical responses can be soothed, which helps the psychological distress lessen too.

Recognizing jealousy questions:

What's the situation?

What are you perceiving as a threat right now?

How is your body responding to this threat right now?

Is your body panicking? If so, is it trying to bite, run, or disengage completely?

After I recognize I'm feeling jealous, I can start attending to my body's needs. For me, being able to interfere quickly can be the difference between experiencing a truly miserable state vs being able to process my jealousy effectively and avoid a sour situation with my pals. I know I can't always prevent jealousy but I absolutely want to prevent unnecessary suffering for myself and all pals involved. I usually draw attention to my physical sensations to gauge my next step: if my ears are already hot, and hands already sweating, it's a good sign I need to intervene before things escalate out of control. At this point I need to remove myself from the distressing situation. Remember, my goal isn't to run away but to give myself time to accurately assess what's happening so I can take constructive action rather than acting impulsively in potentially catastrophic ways.

Ultimately, removing myself from a distressing situation can look like many things. Here's a few strategies I like to use with pals: you can try them if you're stuck on how to deal with the initial jealousy flood:

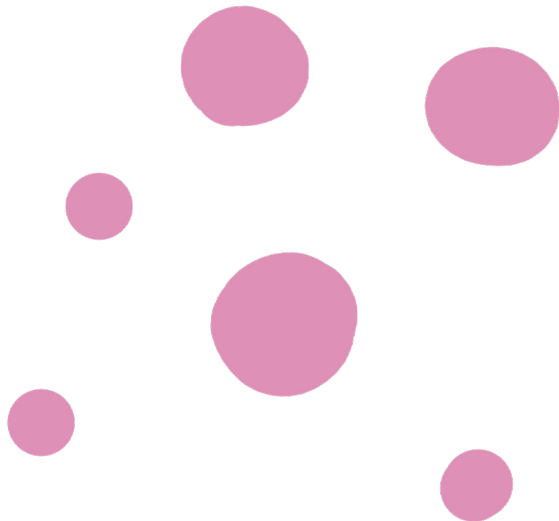
- Tell my pals I'm experiencing jealousy and ask for some time alone
- Excuse myself to go to the bathroom for a few minutes
- Send a text that says "I need some time to process my emotions, I'll reach out to you as soon as I'm able to communicate better with you"
- Ask your pal for some distance for a specified amount of time
- Go home
- Schedule time with a therapist

That said, the way you communicate to your pal that you need some time to calm down is up to y'all's preferences. My friend and her partner have a protocol to send anything that could make each other jealous only through text so they have time to process their emotions apart before ever engaging with each other in person. I would recommend setting an agreement with your pals ahead of time about how you'll communicate to each other in these situations. It's hard to take the space you need if you're in the wrong place or if your partner doesn't know what you're doing. So talk about it first! Set an agreement for each of you, regardless of whether you think you'll use it. It's almost like a safe word or trigger plan. You hope you won't have to use it but it's better to have one anyways. Again, the idea of initiating protocol is to give each other space to process the initial difficult emotions. For some people, being with their pals might work best, for others being alone, with a therapist, or with friends is the best option.

Once I'm in a place where I can manage my jealousy appropriately, I work on grounding myself. I like to think about assigning my body a task to do instead of biting, running, or shutting down entirely. It's unfortunately counterproductive to try to force jealousy away. Instead, I try to cultivate an awareness when I'm feeling spicy, and distance myself enough from the situation. I've learned that when my jealousy is triggered, my body desperately wants to respond in counterproductive ways; to avoid that, I give it a different task. I refocus my body's energy towards a helpful and non-destructive response. This is a skill that takes practice but the more I do it the easier it gets. I use a couple different exercises to clear space for my mind to actually do the necessary work of conflict resolution.

Wall breathing exercise:

The first thing I like to do to help my body breathe is stand up flat against a wall. I lightly push my palms against the wall, the back of my head against the wall, flatten my spine as much as possible against the wall, and tuck my heels in. You get the point. Once I'm standing straight, I take long slow breaths in, and out. I do this for literally as long as I can or need to. I have a tendency to give up before I'm truly calm, so I use other exercises too. But, I'm able to do it longer and longer the more I practice. I used to do this exercise with my pal. When we'd get too riled up, one of us would just say "stop" to the other. That was our signal to back up against the wall. If you're able, I really recommend doing it in the same room. If not, it's totally cool to do it in separate spaces. Normalize breathing. You have 3 fucking minutes to spare in this world. Grant each other the patience to be able to take some deep breaths. If you need some minutes, it's ok. Pals create the conflict together but anyone can change the course of the outcome. Practice giving each other the space to breathe. No one is going anywhere, we all just need to take a deep fucking breath.



Hand washing exercise:

Another thing I love to do (which has become particularly relevant doing the Covid-19 pandemic) is a hand washing exercise when I notice that I'm feeling spicy. It's really easy. I just excuse myself to go to the bathroom and start by doing some wall breaths if possible. Even if it's just a few, it helps me wind down. I then thoroughly wash my hands. I like to do it in cold water and splash some on my face if I'm feeling particularly heated. That shocking moment of cold water on my face has a way of helping me reset a bit. I also like doing a second hand wash with warm water and really appreciate the feeling in my hands. At this point I try to look at my face and identify the emotion that I'm seeing. I spend as much time as it takes for my face to adopt a neutral expression just washing my hands and breathing. . If I'm not relaxed enough to loosen the muscles in my face, then I know for a fact I'm not in a gentle or compassionate space to try to interact with my pal. Again, I would rather be seen as inconsiderate for wasting time than being mean or lashing out at my pal because I didn't take enough space.

Pro-Tip

If you're on the receiving end and your pal is the one that needs time to do the hand washing, breathing, or other exercises please understand that this isn't about you personally. It's so easy to personalize situations, especially when you're involved. But when your pal is in the unfortunate position of dealing with hard emotions, understand that their minds and bodies need a little bit of loving attention so they can operate better. More on teamwork in a second.

Distract & Deescalate

Hopefully you've distracted your body by telling it to breathe instead of panic. Good job. What's so annoying about jealousy is that sometimes our minds won't cooperate. It feels like every part of ourselves are working against us. It's a betraying feeling. Luckily, in the same way that you're able to assign breathing tasks to your body, you can do the same with your mind! Not every distraction tactic is going to work the same for everyone, what's important is finding stuff that works for you. The idea is to make sure that you're focusing your mind away from the thoughts that are making you suffer. Again, sometimes jealousy is inevitable, but ruminating on it won't resolve the problem either. My good friend Davis likes to say, "everything gets better with time and a good therapist," and it's especially true for jealousy. Jealousy itself is not the destructive force, rather it's often our inability to process and communicate through jealousy moments that negatively impact the relationship. Still, the emotional intensity, miscommunication, and insecurity can make relatively simple issues very difficult and painful to resolve. A good rule of thumb I've developed for myself is: let the emotions pass before addressing the issue. This is really helpful to remember what actually needs resolving. That's not to say that you can't experience your emotions, rather recognize when pain is becoming suffering and be mindful of the ways you might be fueling it. I have a whole catalogue of mind games I play with myself to distract myself from spiraling into a jealousy frenzy.

Counting exercise:

My favorite task to give my mind when it's running amok and making wildly creative but unhelpful jealousy scenarios (more on that in a second) is to assign it complex counting tasks. I focus on counting in the four languages I know simultaneously: One, Un, I-chi, Uno, Two, Deux, Ni, Due, Three, Trois, San, Tre... it's really fucking hard and I can't do it for shit. I inevitably screw up the order of the languages or forget something and have to start over. Fantastic distraction. Super tough, completely pointless, really easy to do. If you're monolingual, learning to count in a different language can be super useful for providing a distraction. The more I do this, the less I'm thinking about all the dramatic bullshit in my head. I also like just looking around and seeing things I can quantify -- it can be counting books on a bookshelf, pens, peas on my plate, freckles on my arm, etc. You can also recite whatever you want if numbers don't speak to you. Having a mantra can be useful for anyone needing some distraction or emotional regulation. Again, we're all different and the point is just to find something that works for you.

Distraction Questions:

What task can you give your mind to do when it's panicking?

What kind of distraction methods work best for you?

Music

For me, using music to distract myself is really effective. I like blasting a special playlist full of music that helps me relax -- mine's called "Return to Happy!" Obviously you can also distract yourself with poetry, TV shows, conversation with friends, nature hikes, exercise, and an abundance of other pleasurable activities. In the Dialectical Behavioral Therapy Skills Workbook they discuss this notion of time traveling: when you're stuck either worrying about what went wrong in the past or fretting over the future. Time traveling makes it really hard to be present in the moment and fuel a ton of unnecessary jealousy. If you're finding yourself reminiscing or foreshadowing a lot it's probably time to do something else. Find activities that can keep you in the present. There's no point in time traveling, it won't solve your jealousy. The best you can do is focus on calming your mind and body so brainstorming solutions can be a viable possibility. I use my playlist as a gauge of whether or not I feel ready to address an issue by challenging myself to get through the entire hour and a half just focusing on the music rather and not spiraling. At the beginning of the playlist my mind is all over the place -- if I can't make it through an entire song without time traveling then I know I'm not ready yet. It's ok to need more time.

Pro-Tip

Deescalation is crucial: effective jealousy management requires a really good amount of time to settle down. Resist the urge to try to immediately skip from feeling like shit to feeling better. Counting for 5 minutes won't immediately work, it's a practice. Ultimately, the goal is just to break out of the tailspin and make sure you're not falling from mid air.

The last step I do before even thinking about problem solving is self-soothing. It's usually not enough to just distract ourselves. The thoughts usually come back the second we stop the distraction. Self-soothing gives us the radical and supportive self-love that we require to get through these situations. I love keeping a soothing library for when I'm feeling extra bad. I include a bunch of shit I like:

Indica to smooth away any racing thoughts

Bath, shower, or hot tub... whatever I can get wet in I'm happy

Cute texts that my pals have sent me (for some this doesn't feel good so obviously do what works for you!)

Beautiful art books that I love flipping through

Vegan recipes (I cook vengeful meals when I'm particularly mad at my pals. I cook something elaborate and enjoy it by myself knowing they can't have any. It's petty but harmless)

Polyam support group chat

All the animal TikTok videos obviously

A shit ton of vibrators from my short time at Honey Play Box (orgasms are an AWESOME recommended way of dealing with shitty jealous feelings. Anger can be activating and make you horny, plus happy hormones get squirted into your brain when you cum).

Make your own list of shit that makes you feel good:

Raging in Color

I can't for the life of me remember where I originally heard the phrase "raging in color," but it accurately describes the art practice I used with really young kids who were undergoing chemo treatment at my previous job. Many of these kids were experiencing all kinds of emotions due to pain, drugs, and other overwhelming circumstances. My job was to soothe them, if not only temporarily. I remember giving a particularly aggressive three year old who was not having a good time crayons and watched him tear into the paper. I'd never seen anyone so small make such passionately violent art. There's something magical about the lack of inhibition kids have when it comes to their creative output. I've adopted a similar method of just smashing art supplies and scribbling furiously when I'm in an intense emotional state. I often do this standing, using already (?)messy art supplies. The product is completely irrelevant, the only goal is releasing the emotions that get pent up during jealousy episodes. It's colorful, physically engaging, creative and even more awesome than dumping on someone who isn't ready. When I'm mad or scared or sad these wild scribbles become really cathartic. I usually take it a step further and burn whatever I made after the fact. This way I figuratively let go of the emotions associated. Planning to burn my scribbles also reinforces that I don't have to censor myself or show anyone the final piece. It's about giving myself permission to be as messy as necessary with absolutely no consequences whatsoever. Again, the specifics of your art practice don't really matter, if your form of artwork is music, dance, chainsaw art, crafts, writing, whatever. The goal really has less to do with the outcome or the practice but rather the freedom to emote.

Part 2:

Integrity

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INTEGRITY

Once you're calmer, you can move towards identifying solutions for your jealousy. When I'm trying to find solutions I want them to be mutually beneficial for myself, my relationships, and my polycule. Basically I want to embrace my integrity (or the sense of being in alignment with core principles). I believe you can align your behavior to sustain, respect, nurture, and embrace your personal preferences in relationships, which in turn creates your sense of integrity. It can be difficult to articulate what integrity looks like for you but it's useful in jealousy management. Integrity means recognizing that even when you're in emotionally activated states you will still behave in ways that uphold your core values and personal beliefs. When I'm acting with integrity I'm behaving in ways that feel good and do good.

Define some of the core principles:

What are some of your values?

How do you show up authentically to relationships?

How do you know when you've made a mistake?

I also like to look at my behavior in handling the current jealousy situation. I want to see if it's aligned with my integrity, and if not define what would have been a more authentic course of action for me.

Assessing the situation

How have you behaved so far?

Have you done anything destructive?

If so, what will you have to "fix"?

How would you like to behave moving forward?

Once I have an outline of my integrity I can start to assess whether I'm experiencing creative jealousy, or need-based jealousy. For this stage you'll want to start observing what your jealousy is telling you.

Creative Jealousy

Do you ever get it where a little tiny insignificant detail plays around in your mind and causes you to imagine wacky jealousy scenarios that really aren't grounded in reality? I call this "creative jealousy." It happens: I try not to judge myself too harshly for it but I also remain vigilant when my jealousy is becoming too creative. Luckily with some good practices, it can be soothed and relatively easily dealt with. It may feel like shit in the moment, but the very easy solution is to "get out of my head" as my beautiful strong girlfriend always reminds me.

Solutions for creative jealousy:

1. Admit that you're feeling jealous! To yourself, to your pals, to whoever you can count on for emotional support. Being ashamed of your jealousy won't make it easier
2. Notice the specific triggers in your creative scenarios. What "bad thing" do you think will happen?
3. Ask your pals for tangible support in resolving that tension. Ask for their input on the situation. Give them the opportunity to explain the situation from their perspective
4. Focus on how you can build trust with your partner. Continue to practice gratitude together and form security.

Gratitude Exercise

In my early days of Polyam, I read about this cool study demonstrating that fear and gratitude can't exist in your mind at the same time. They suggested that if you're experiencing fear based jealousy (the core emotion of creative jealousy) you can trick your brain by listing things you're grateful for. I'm not entirely sure how sound the science is, but I like this idea a lot. It's about exerting more energy in cultivating love and compassion, rather than focusing on the negative and allowing your jealousy to become all-consuming. When I'm feeling extra jealous I like to write myself Post-It notes of things I like and that I'm thankful for. It's a simple journaling exercise that I come back to when I'm feeling down.

Need-Based Jealousy

The other common form of jealousy in ENM is need-based. Unlike creative jealousy, this type arises from a mismatch in expectations between pals. One pal may be expecting something that their pal cannot or will not deliver, while the other pal may have set the expectation and failed to live up to it. This jealousy is important to name because it will require coming together and negotiating new BAES (boundaries, agreements, expectations, and solutions). This form of jealousy cannot be resolved alone and will require cooperation from your relationships and polycule. It's also important to note at this point that just because you set an expectation doesn't mean you're entitled to the outcome. Remember that expectations are requests from your pals not authoritarian mandates. You're allowed to discuss any of your needs (you're allowed to have them in the first place) but your pal doesn't have to accept your request. It can be painful when your pals aren't able to meet your needs but part of ENM is realizing that a single person can't always align with you. Letting go of outcomes and self-righteousness can help move through need-based jealousy in healthier ways.

Need-Based Jealousy Questions

What are your needs?

What are your expectations of your pals?

How did you communicate that expectation to your pals?

What are your pals' expectations?

Where is there conflict or misunderstanding?

What are some initial thoughts on mutually beneficial solutions?

Part 3:

Teamwork

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TEAMWORK

When you're dealing with jealousy, often your best resource will be your pals. Treat your pal with curiosity rather than vilification. You need to know what's going on with them too! I know it can be easy to see each other on opposite teams when dealing with conflict, but coming to compromises that work for everyone requires cooperation. Refusing to hear out your pals, stonewalling, getting aggressive, or otherwise antagonizing the situation, will make it far harder to solve the issue. And I get that in moments where your jealousy is activated you might feel spicy emotions and become self-righteous. I really understand that there are a bunch of cognitive traps we fall into that make teamwork hard. But getting in the habit of working WITH your pals on problem solving is crucial to sustaining polyam relationships.

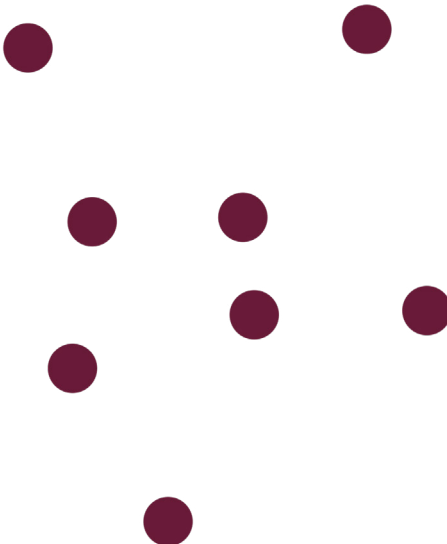
**YOU CAN'T DO POLYAMORY WITHOUT YOUR
PALS' SUPPORT! AND VICE VERSA!**

Being too pushy

Pushing a pal into a tough conversation that they aren't ready for isn't doing anyone any favors. It's important to challenge each other to deal with jealousy, but give whoever is struggling with hard emotions the privilege to set the pace. If they're telling you that something is too much, respect that. Set realistic goals for each other. It can be hard to cooperate with someone who's not able to go as quickly, but put yourself in the reverse situation. Understand that most issues aren't life or death situations that need immediate resolution. Giving your pal the space, time, and support to deal with their emotions. Doing this isn't an act of selflessness. It simply means that once they show up for conversation they'll be able to do so with a clearer mind and give you their best ability to problem solve.

Stonewalling

It can be super frustrating when one pal is constantly requesting more time apart. It can feel like nothing is moving forward, but I encourage you both to be mindful of the difference between needing time and stone walling. I like to set an agreement with my pals that whoever walks away or requests space, time, or support also be the first one to re-engage as soon as they're able. However, it's not unusual for pals to chronically ask for time or space as a way to avoid dealing with conflict. Truth is, most of us feel incompetent at conflict resolution. Non-violent communication classes can be great for working on this together. I also recommend a couples counselor or mediator who can help y'all stay on track with these conversations. If your pal still won't show up, perhaps it's a good idea to renegotiate the scope of your relationship. The unfortunate truth is that consensually alternative relationship structures aren't always the best option for everyone at given times. I had a pal with whom ENM worked really well for a while but after his life circumstances changed the added stress made it impossible to sustain. It's not always anyone's fault directly. If you're giving everything and your pal still won't show up, it can be useful to seek different ways of moving forward.



Couple's Privilege:

It's normal to want to take it slow and put safe-guards in place to protect your relationship when you're first opening up. However, trying to replicate monogamy within an ENM/polyam setup is counter-productive. I talk to a lot of couples who are so scared of losing control over the situation (and ultimately their perceived exclusivity and security) that they place unethical "boundaries" in their relationships to limit change: limiting the time and access to other pals, enacting veto power, disregarding privacy within other relationships etc . I won't pretend like I've never done that, I'm 100% guilty of ending up in starvation mindsets and patterns of insecurity. What I DID learn though is to embrace change. At the end of the day, focusing more on how you can continue to add value to your existing relationship rather than on limiting outside ones (something you don't have control over) then you're giving yourself a better chance at success. The goal of polyam isn't to go back to monogamy -- as long as you're adding value to your pals' lives, there's no reason for you to be replaced in the relationship. It's important to be mindful of the way our jealousy manifests. It happens to all of us, but that shows there's more room for growth and improvement!

Friendship Paradigm:

I frequently get calls from people who're stuck on how to ethically work through conflict in ENM. They often focus on how much veto power they can exert rather than focusing on how they can promote mutually beneficial problem solving. In my experience, any effort to resolve conflict that exerts power over a specific person leads to resentment, further problems, and is unethical behavior. I often suggest to these couples to put aside the sexual or romantic component of the relationship and problem solve the same way you would with friends. If you were to remove the factors that trigger competitive behavior and mindsets, how would

you approach the problem? If your pal was spending time with a platonic friend, how much control would you try to exert? I find it can be super productive to look at how you set up your friend groups and dynamics to inform the way you set up your polycule. People often get hung up on whether or not it is ethical to be primary partners, what relationship anarchy means, and if they can have a say in outside relationships. My question is always, would you do that to friends? Jealousy often clouds our ability to be compassionate and experience compersion. It's not to say that we can't feel jealousy in friendships, there's just less tolerance for ownership behavior the way we see normalized in romantic relationships. Use these questions to help guide you if you're stuck.

Looking at friendship questions

How do you like to set up your friend group? How do your pals?

How much say do you have in your pals friendships? Vice versa?

If conflict arises with your friends how do you deal with it?

What are some boundaries you have with your friends?

Part 4:

Chill the Fuck Out

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CHILL THE FUCK OUT

My favorite piece of advice for dealing with jealousy is: Chill The Fuck Out! It's so simple yet so hard to do. Often when I'm experiencing jealousy, I end up in a head space of self-righteousness, entitlement, and justification. This mindset leads me to catastrophize the situation in a completely unhelpful way. I stop noticing my blind-spots, assume the worst, and feel like this jealousy episode is going to kill me. Obviously, all of this is untrue. As I've been saying, jealousy itself isn't destructive, it's what we do with that energy that can become problematic. Getting in the habit of letting things go helps me move through jealousy more productively.

My friend has a great way of approaching this: if it's going to continue bothering you and eat at you in the future, then address the issue with your pals. But if you're just feeling spicy and know there's actually nothing that can reasonably be done, then work on letting it go. It's easy to blow every issue into full-scale conflict. Especially when you're starting to explore ENM everything can feel extra painful. I often hear pals keeping score of who hurt who, or trying to justify their own shitty actions. The goal of polyam isn't to hurt people -- it's to have more supportive and meaningful relationships. Learning ways to care less about the outcomes and more about the people is a challenge for everyone.

Dissonance Theory:

As part of my jealousy management learning, I've been diving into cognitive biases that make it hard for us to recognize when we're wrong. The book *Mistakes Were Made (But Not By Me)* by Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson dives deep into dissonance theory, which is the feeling of discomfort when we hold two conflicting beliefs. It explains the various cognitive biases we all have that make it so hard to admit when we've made mistakes. Dissonance theory postulates that folks have a subconscious investment in

maintaining a positive self-image -- when circumstances contradict this image we go to great lengths to justify our actions. Essentially, we want to be good but mostly we want to be consistent with our self-image. When we behave in ways that go against that image, it can make it harder to admit we're wrong. That's why it's crucial to PRACTICE being wrong. It goes against the way our brains are wired but is important when practicing polyam. Understanding that we're hard-wired to justify our beliefs (even if they're wrong) helps me notice when those mechanisms are activated. It's been useful to read this book and talk to my pals about ways that we can work through conflict to override these tendencies. So far, I've been able to deescalate three instances of conflict with my pals by simply noticing self-justifying behavior and choosing instead to say "I'm wrong, I'm sorry." Very useful!

Radical Acceptance

Radical Acceptance frameworks give you the opportunity to recognize that less-than ideal things will sometimes happen. Learning ENM skills doesn't change the reality that you can't always get what you want, and there isn't always a "correct" solution to a situation. You might try to fix things with your pals and still feel like shit in the end. Radical acceptance teaches that it's ok for things out of our control to happen. I like to practice some coping thoughts to help with radical acceptance:

"This situation doesn't have to be bad"

"My pal deserves to be happy even if this isn't exactly the outcome I had hoped for"

"My pal will extend themselves to me too"

"AFOG!" (Another fucking opportunity for growth)

The radical acceptance framework also asks us to consider the things we can control (hint: it's yourself) in a situation and let go of the things we can't. For example, we might not be able to get our pals to see our perspective or change their mind about a topic, but we can give ourselves the self-care to make spicy emotions easier to manage. Focusing on our ability to grow and do better in the future is vastly important, but so is restoring belief in our own agency.

Chilly questions

What emotions can you identify in your jealousy?

How are spicy emotions impacting your view of the situation?

What can you control?

What is beyond your control?

What can you let go of?

Part 5:
Hindsight Debrief

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HINDSIGHT DEBRIEF

Hopefully after going through these steps, you'll have identified a few ways to approach conflict resolution (If you need more help, look up my resources on setting BAES, it goes deeper into the details). I really like to give my pals and I the ability to debrief when we're no longer in heightened emotional states whether that's within a couple hours or in a few months. There's not a right or wrong timeline for doing debriefs, but I encourage the person who experienced the jealousy outbreak to take initiative in bringing it back up. Remember that no one's to blame. The goal here is to reevaluate the situation with a fresh perspective. I also like to take this time with my pal to reinforce the good progress we made so we can continue to act kindly and respectfully towards one another when future jealousy comes up.

Happy Office Hours

I suggest setting up deliberate and consistent time to check-in with your pals. I like to do a Happy Office Hour every Thursday. Having a dedicated time ensures that we're doing necessary relationship maintenance. The Multiamory Podcast has RADAR format that creates a deliberate conversation structure if you want something formal. My pals and I usually bring 3 things we feel are going well in the relationship and 3 things we want to work on. We keep it simple and focus on listening and problem solving rather than taking sides or being "right". These discussions help normalize getting and giving feedback constructively. I like having Happy Office Hours in public places (or on walks during pandemic) to help us all stay cool and level headed. It also allows us to keep perspective with our issues. Relationship conversations can literally "hit too close to home." Going somewhere to talk can help open our eyes to new solutions that we wouldn't have considered if we stayed in the place where conflict often arises.

Hindsight Debrief Questions

What was the situation at hand?

How was jealousy initially handled?

What did y'all do well?

What could've been done differently?

What was the outcome?

What tangible support do y'all need from each other?

What's one lesson you've walked away with?

You're ready to go!

There's not a single magic trick that will help you solve jealousy. Remember, it's a BITCH for a reason. But continue practicing these skills and coming back to them regularly. The more y'all work together the easier it will be to get on the same page. Also, if you don't have a copy yet, pick up *The Jealousy Workbook* by Kathy Labriola for a more comprehensive guide to managing jealousy! Good luck with all of it.

