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Witlessly Punishing My Boyfriend's Desirable Behavior

I have been dating my boyfriend for over a year and a half now. When we first dated everything was perfect. He was so sweet, attentive, and considerate. But since then we have broken up several times. Each time we continued acting as if we were dating, just without the title, and eventually got back together.

We fought about stupid little things and become furious when one of us behaved inappropriately. When we last broke up it was most ugly. We both began to see other people, which was difficult, as we live in the same house (although in different units). Eventually we realized that we continued to care for each other and preferred each other to the people whom we had begun to date.

We talked about what we were going to do to improve our relationship. We decided to let the smaller issues go and accept each other. We also agreed to not bring up arguments from the past. This has worked very well and we get along better than ever.

There is, however, one troubling issue. My boyfriend is a chef who works only nights. Most nights he returns straight home from work. Though he finishes work at varying times, I usually have a good idea of when he will arrive home. But sometimes he decides, at the last minute, to go out after work. So, occasionally I find myself alone at 11 PM or midnight worrying about him when I had expected him home between 9 PM and 10 PM and he had not called.

This is frustrating. First it is inconsiderate, as I always inform him of my whereabouts as well as any delays I encounter. Secondly he does not have a cell phone so

I cannot call him once he has left work. Finally, and this is one of the major issues we had to discuss before deciding to get back together, he drinks a bit too much. Since we've been back together he has cut down on his drinking significantly. However, while we were broken up, he also bought a car. This last point concerns me greatly. When I don't hear from my boyfriend who has a car and a drinking problem: I worry.

The first time he did not call after work, after we had gotten back together, he eventually came home after 1 AM. Upon his arrival I screamed at him for being so inconsiderate in not calling me and letting me know what he was doing. This produced a huge fight. The following day, he informed me that he felt attacked when I screamed at him, and understandably so.

When he next was late arriving home and had not called, he called me from a bar with one of his buddy's cell phones. He told me that he was sorry about calling late and that he would be home shortly. On the phone, I didn't yell at him but I was very rude and brief with him. He didn't arrive home until two hours later. When he finally got home, we fought. This process repeated itself a few more times.

I slowly realized that I had been punishing his calling and telling me of his whereabouts. I decided that if I wanted him to call me promptly about going out after work, I must change my behavior. So, the next time I received a late call from my boyfriend telling me that he had been out for two hours, I didn't scream and I wasn't rude or brief with him, but I did tell him that it hurts my feelings when I don't hear from him because it makes me feel like he doesn't care about me.

This didn't work so well either. When he came home he felt so bad that I had to comfort him and assure him that I wasn't mad. I realized that although my behaviors were different they still punished his late reports of what he was doing.

When his undesirable behavior next reoccurred, he called telling me he was at a bar and promising to be home shortly. I cheerfully responded, "Thank you for letting me know. I'll see you when you get home. In this way, I positively reinforced his calling even though it was late. Also, instead of telling him that night that I would prefer a phone call before he goes out as opposed to after he is already out, I waited until the next morning. In the morning, I first thanked him again for calling me and then stated that I would prefer the phone call before rather than after his going out.

The last time the undesirable behavior occurred I called one of his bar buddies to find out about my boyfriend. I usually don't do this but the roads were snow covered and I was worried. My boyfriend came to the phone and immediately apologized for not having called me sooner and told me that he would be home shortly. I said OK and apologized for bothering him but told him that I did so only because I was worried about the snow. He did come home shortly.

The next morning he told me that it was fine to call any of his friends to get in touch with him. Although the desirable behavior is not occurring 100% of the time, these successive approximations are good enough for me. Yes!