Am I being subtly abused?

Subtle abuse is:

‘Undermining, withholding and limiting behaviours enacted in ways that are difficult to detect by the victim or their friends and family. Such abuse leads to emotional and behavioural changes in victims.’ Parkinson et al., (2024)

You can look in more detail at your relationship and assess it through the lens of subtle abuse by answering these questions:

1. Do you often feel confused when with your partner or when thinking about things they have said or done?
2. Do you feel that your head and your heart are telling you different things? Maybe your partner explains things so clearly that you believe things are true, but you also can’t work out why you feel that they are not?
3. Do you check with yourself as to whether the things you’re asking of your partner, or how you are behaving with your partner, is ‘reasonable’?
4. Do you find yourself pushing away thoughts or feelings to make things go smoothly day to day with your partner?
5. Do you put your needs to one side and focus on making sure your partner is okay?
6. Do you feel anxious in your relationship, or that you are treading on eggshells with your partner?
7. Is your partner moody and you try to work out why this is? Do you decide it is something you have done and find yourself changing your behaviour to try to avert it happening?
8. Do you often compromise on things that used to be important to you?
9. Does your partner undermine you but quite subtly, leaving you feeling rubbish about yourself? For example, maybe your partner admires you, but also says you’re not achieving your potential?
10. Has how you think about yourself changed since being in this relationship? Perhaps your self-esteem has become worse? Perhaps you have begun to believe there’s something wrong with you or you are fundamentally flawed?
11. Do you sometimes feel uncared for by your partner, as though they don’t give you the affection or resources you need or expected in a relationship?
12. Do you find that the way your life with your partner is arranged seems to limit what you can do?
13. Do you sense that your partner wants to know more about you than you feel comfortable sharing? Do you feel they doesn’t respect your personal boundaries and are instead intrusive? Perhaps you even feel as though you don’t have the private space in your head you want?

This questionnaire is intended as an educational tool and is not intended for diagnosis. However, if you have answered yes to some questions then you should consider whether you may be experiencing subtle abuse within your relationship.

If you think you may be in a subtly abusive relationship consider who you might trust to talk to about what you are realising. An understanding of how you feel and how this relates to your partner’s behaviour is the first step in making decisions about your relationship.