

The FOG Check

FEAR · OBLIGATION · GUILT — NOTICING WHAT SHAPES A CHOICE

FOG is a term from Susan Forward's writing on emotional blackmail. It describes how **fear, obligation, or guilt** can become powerful enough to shape a person's choices, sometimes more than their own genuine wishes do. This worksheet is best used by looking closely at **one specific interaction and how it affected you** — it is not a checklist for labelling another person, and it isn't something to fill in during or immediately after a heated moment.

WHAT THIS FORM IS — AND ISN'T — FOR

This is a self-reflection tool, not a diagnostic instrument or a test of another person's character or intentions. Relationships are complicated, and feeling fear, obligation, or guilt doesn't always mean someone is being manipulative — sometimes it reflects genuine care, a difficult trade-off, or your own history. The aim is simply to notice what influenced your choice in one moment, so you can look at it with more clarity together in session.

FEAR

What did I think would happen if I said no?

OBLIGATION

What did I believe I owed them?

GUILT

What did I make myself responsible for?

01 What Happened?

Describe the request, disagreement, or situation as plainly as you can. What did the other person want? What did you want? What happened when your wishes were different from theirs?

02 What Contributed to the FOG?

Tick anything that felt true for you in that moment. These describe your own experience — not a judgment of the other person.

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| ☐ I was afraid they would become angry | ☐ I was afraid they would withdraw or leave |
| ☐ I feared punishment or retaliation | ☐ I feared being rejected or abandoned |
| ☐ I felt responsible for their feelings | ☐ I felt I owed them something |
| ☐ I thought a "good" partner/friend/family member would say yes | ☐ I felt selfish or guilty for saying no |
| ☐ I was reminded of what they had done for me | ☐ I was made to feel I hadn't done enough |
| ☐ I blamed myself for their distress | ☐ I felt I had to prove that I cared |

03 What Pattern or Pressure Did I Notice?

This describes what you noticed in the interaction — try to stick to what was said or done, rather than an assumption about intent.

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| ☐ Guilt-tripping or blame | ☐ Threats or implied consequences |
| ☐ Silent treatment or withdrawal | ☐ Anger, intimidation, or escalation |
| ☐ Repeated pressure after I said no | ☐ Questioning or challenging my right to say no |
| ☐ "If you loved / cared about me..." or conditional affection | ☐ Bringing up past sacrifices or favours |
| ☐ Being made responsible for their suffering | ☐ Promises or rewards if I comply |
| ☐ Being made to doubt my own memory or judgment | ☐ Turning the issue back onto me |
| ☐ Public or private embarrassment | ☐ Something else |

WHAT DID I DO NEXT?

- ☐ Gave in
- ☐ Apologised
- ☐ Explained myself repeatedly
- ☐ Changed my decision
- ☐ Tried to calm them
- ☐ Stayed silent
- ☐ Held my position
- ☐ Left or ended the conversation

What was I hoping to prevent, or trying to achieve?

WHAT HAPPENED TO MY SENSE OF CHOICE?

- ☐ I still felt free to choose
- ☐ I chose it, but under real pressure
- ☐ It felt like I had no real choice
- ☐ I'm not sure

If the fear, guilt, or sense of obligation hadn't been there, what might I have chosen?

04 Stepping Back: What Do I Notice About the Pattern?

Is this a one-off, or something that tends to repeat? What happens when you hold a boundary? What does it tend to cost you to go along with it — and what does it cost you not to?

A USEFUL DISTINCTION

Feeling guilty doesn't automatically mean you've done something wrong, and feeling obligated doesn't automatically mean you owe someone compliance. Fear deserves particular attention: if saying no carries a realistic threat of retaliation, intimidation, or harm, that is a safety concern first, not just a FOG pattern to examine.



If you are afraid of retaliation, threats, violence, stalking, or sexual coercion — please prioritise your safety and seek professional support rather than confronting the situation alone. Bring this to session so we can think about safety planning together.

SOURCES

Concept of Fear, Obligation, and Guilt (FOG) drawn from Forward, S., & Frazier, D. (1997). *Emotional Blackmail: When the People in Your Life Use Fear, Obligation, and Guilt to Manipulate You*. HarperCollins. This worksheet is an original clinician-developed exercise inspired by that concept — not a reproduction of any published instrument, and not a diagnostic or validated tool.