

Signs to Look for in an Abusive Personality

Many people are interested in ways to predict whether they are about to become involved with someone who will be physically abusive. Below is a list of common behaviors that are seen in abusive people. Many victims do not realize that these early behaviors are warning signs of potential future physical abuse, such as the last four (***) behaviors. If the person has several (three or more) of the first 12 listed behaviors, there is a strong potential for physical violence -- the more signs a person has, the more likely the person is a batterer. In some cases, a batterer may only have a couple of behaviors that the victim can recognize, but they may be very exaggerated (e.g., will try to explain his behavior as signs of his love and concern), and a victim may be flattered at first. However, as time goes by, the behavior becomes more severe and serves to dominate or control the other person.

1. Jealousy: At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will always say that jealousy is a sign of love; jealousy has nothing to do with love, it is a sign of possessiveness and lack of trust. He will question the other person about whom she talks to, accuse her of flirting, or be jealous of the time she spends with her family or friends. As the jealousy progresses, he may call frequently during the day or drop by unexpectedly. He may refuse to let you work for fear you will meet someone else, or even do strange behaviors like checking your car mileage or asking friends to watch you.

2. Controlling Behavior: At first, the batterer will say that this behavior is because he is concerned with your safety, your need to use your time well, or your need to make good decisions. He will be angry if you are late coming back from an appointment or a class, he will question you closely about where you went and whom you talked to. As this behavior gets worse, he may not let you make personal decisions about your clothing, hair style, appearance.

3. Quick Involvement: Many people in abusive relationships dated or knew their abusive partners for less than six months before they were married, engaged or living together. He comes on like a whirlwind, claiming, "You are the only person I could ever talk to" or "I've never felt like this for anyone before. He will pressure you to commit to the relationship in such a way that you may later feel guilty or that you are "letting him down" if you want to slow down involvement or break up.

4. Unrealistic Expectations: Abusive people will expect their partner to meet all their needs; he expects you to be the perfect boyfriend/girlfriend, the perfect friend or the perfect lover. He will say things like, "If you love me, I'm all you need and you are all I need." You are supposed to take care of all of his emotional needs.

5. Isolation: The abusive person will try to cut you off from all resources. He accuses you of being "tied to your mother's apron strings," or your friends of "trying to cause trouble" between you. If you have a friend of the opposite sex, you are "going out on him" and if you have friends of the same sex, he may accuse you of being gay.

6. Blames Others for Problems: He is chronically unemployed, someone is always waiting for him to do wrong or mess up or someone is always out to get him. He may make mistakes

and blame you for upsetting him. He may accuse you of preventing him from concentrating on school. He will tell you that you are at fault for almost anything that goes wrong.

7. Blames Others for Feelings: He will tell you, "You make me mad," "You are hurting me by not doing what I want you to do," or "I can't help being angry." He really makes the decisions about how he thinks or feels, but will use feelings to manipulate you.

8. Hypersensitivity: An abusive person is easily insulted, and claims that their feelings are hurt when really he is very mad. He often takes the slightest setbacks as personal attacks. He will rant about things that are really just part of living like being asked to work overtime, getting a traffic ticket, being asked to help others with chores.

9. Cruelty to Animals or Children: This is a person who punishes animals brutally or is insensitive to their pain and suffering. He may tease younger brothers or sisters until they cry.

10. "Playful" use of Force in Sex: This kind of person is likely to throw you down or try to hold you down during making out, or he may want you to act out fantasies in which you are helpless. He is letting you know that the idea of sex is exciting. He may show little concern about whether you want affection and may sulk or use anger to manipulate you into compliance.

11. Verbal Abuse: In addition to saying things that are meant to be cruel and hurtful, this can be seen when the abusive person tries to degrade you, curses you, calls you names or makes fun of your accomplishments. The abusive person will tell you that you are stupid and unable to function without him. This may involve waking you up to verbally abuse you or not letting you go to sleep until you talk out an argument.

12. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: Many people are confused by their abusive partner's "sudden" changes in mood -- you may think he has a mental problem because he is nice one minute and the next minute he is exploding. Explosiveness and moodiness are typical of people who are abusive to their partners, and these behaviors are related to other characteristics like hypersensitivity.

13. * Past Battering:** This person may say that he has hit girlfriends in the past but the other person "made him do it." You may hear from relatives or past girlfriends that he is abusive. An abusive person will be physically abusive to any one they are with if the other person is with them long enough for the violence to begin; situational circumstances do not change a person into an abuser.

14. * Threats of violence:** This could include any threat of physical force meant to control you: "I'll slap you," "I'll kill you," or "I'll break your neck." Most people do not threaten their partners, but the abusive person will try to excuse his threats by saying, "Everybody talks that way."

15. * Breaking or Striking Objects:** This behavior is used as a punishment (breaking loved possessions), but is mostly used to terrorize you into submission. The abuser may beat on the table with his fists, throw objects at or near you, kick the car, slam the door or drive at a high rate of speed or recklessly to scare you. Not only is this a sign of extreme emotional immaturity, but there is great danger when someone thinks they have the "right" to punish or frighten you.

16. * Any Force During an Argument:** This may involve an abusive partner holding you down, physically restraining you from leaving the room, any pushing or shoving. He may hold you against the wall and say, "You are going to listen to me."

Mixed Messages

- My partner loves me . . . he didn't mean to hurt me.
- Abuse is about power and control. It is not about love.
- My partner promised to get counseling
- Abusers tend to make promises when they feel they are not in control.
- When you file charges, you have taken control away from your abuser, who is likely to promise anything to get that control back.
- It is just that my partner was under a lot of stress . . . or drunk.
- You can choose to believe that there are reasons, but there can never be a justifiable reason for your abuse.
- It will never happen again.
- It might. Chances are, it will if your abuser is not held accountable.
- It's really not that bad, we have had great times.

All relationships have good and bad times, but violent relationships are not good for anyone. Healthy relationships are based on caring, equality and respect. They are not about power and control.

Types of Abuse

EMOTIONAL ABUSE - This is often the first sign of abusive behavior exhibited by someone who batters. In the beginning it may as simple as the silent treatment, but it often progresses to angry words and put downs.

- Finding faults in all your friends/family (this is the first step in the isolation process)
- Withholding emotions, not talking or sharing, withholding approval or affections
- Does not acknowledge your feelings
- Continuous criticism
- Name-calling, mocking, put-downs
- Yelling, swearing, being lewd
- Pressure tactics (using guilt trips, rushing you, threats to leave)
- Humiliated in public (including outbursts of anger to insults in public)
- Manipulation by lies, omitting facts, or telling only portions of the facts
- Angry gestures, slamming doors, throwing things, hitting walls or furniture near you
- Threats (to harm you, to not pay bills, to not buy groceries, etc.)
- Using children (making threats to take them or to call DHS, criticizing your parenting skills)

ECONOMIC ABUSE - Again, this begins in subtle ways and develops into the abuser's dominant control over all economic aspects.

- Insisting that you quit your job (saying he will take care of you, sites faults with coworkers and bosses - point out how they "mistreat" you)

- Recanting on promises to pay bills (for example, your car payment, insurance, etc.)
- Makes you account for your spending with no accounting for abuser's spending
- Limiting your access to funds (taking ATM card or removing your name from accounts)
- Not paying bills, buying groceries, or taking care of the children's needs

PHYSICAL ABUSE - This is usually first exhibited by getting "in your face" or invading your personal space during an argument and progresses into offensive and harmful touches.

- Shouting at you
- Invading your personal space
- Poke/pinch
- Grab/hold
- Push/shove
- Pull hair
- Slap/Punch
- Bite/spit
- Kick/stomp
- Cleaning/displaying weapons
- Refusing to let you leave
- Being locked in/out of house
- Destroying your possessions
- Abandoned in dangerous places
- Driving recklessly
- Disabling car, hiding keys to car
- Refusing medical care
- Hurtful/unwanted touching of sexual parts
- Rape (use of force, threats, coercion, or manipulation to obtain sex)
- Intimidating by blocking exit, making threatening gestures
- Refusing to let you sleep until he is ready to sleep

Are You in an Abusive Relationship?

Answering the following questions may help you determine whether the relationship you are in is abusive. Check the questions that apply to you:

Does your partner:

- Embarrass you in front of people?
- Belittle your accomplishments?
- Make you feel unworthy?
- Criticize your sexual performance?
- Constantly contradict himself/herself to confuse you?
- Do things for which you are constantly making excuses to others or yourself?
- Isolate you from many of the people you care about most?
- Make you feel ashamed a lot of the time?
- Make you believe he is smarter than you and therefore more able to make decisions?
- Make you feel like you are crazy?
- Make you perform sexual acts that are embarrassing or demeaning to you?
- Use intimidation to make you do what he wants?
- Prevent you from doing common-place activities such as visiting friends or family, or talking to the opposite sex?
- Control the financial aspects of your life?

- Use money as a way of controlling you?
- Make you believe that you can not exist without him?
- Make you feel that there is no way out and that "you made your own bed and you must lie in it"?
- Make you find ways of compromising your feelings for the sake of peace?
- Treat you roughly (grab, pinch, push, or shove you)?
- Threaten you (verbally or with a weapon)?
- Hold you to keep you from leaving after an argument?
- Lose control when he is drunk or using drugs?
- Get extremely angry, frequently, and without an apparent cause?
- Escalate his anger into violence . . .slapping, kicking, etc?
- Not believe that he has hurt you, nor feel sorry for what he has done?
- Physically force you to do what you do not want to do?

Do you:

Do you believe you can help your partner change his abusive behavior if you were only to change yourself in some way, if you only did some things differently, if you really loved him more?

Believe that you deserve to be abused or punished?

Find that not making him angry has become a major part of your life?

Do what he wants you to do, rather than what you want to do, out of fear?

Stay with him only because you're afraid he might hurt you if you left?

If you answered "yes" to many of these questions, you have identified an abusive relationship. If the abuse has occurred during dating, it is very likely to continue after marriage. Once physical abuse has occurred, it is likely to occur again and to escalate over time. You cannot change your partner's behavior. You can only change yourself. It is not necessary to stay in a relationship of fear. You have the right to choose how you wish to live.

Traits And Characteristics Of Violent Offenders

1. Low Frustration Tolerance - Reacts to stress in self-defeating ways, unable to cope effectively with anxiety, acts out when frustrated. Frustration leads to aggression.

2. Impulsive - Is quick to act, wants immediate gratification, has little or no consideration for the consequences, lacks insight, has poor judgment, has limited cognitive filtering.

3. Emotional Liability/Depression - Quick-tempered, short-fused, hot-headed, rapid mood swings, moody, sullen, irritable, humorless.

4. Childhood Abuse - Sexual and physical abuse, maternal or paternal deprivation, rejection, abandonment, exposure to violent role models in the home.

5. Loner - Is isolated and withdrawn, has poor interpersonal relations, has no empathy for others, lacks feeling of guilt and remorse.

6. Overly sensitive - Hypersensitive to criticism and real or perceived slights, suspicious, fearful, distrustful, paranoid.

7. Altered Consciousness - Sees red, "blinking," has blackouts, de-realization/depersonalization. ("It's like I wasn't there" or "It was me, but not me"), impaired reality testing, hallucinations.

8. Threats of Violence - Toward self and/or others, direct, veiled, implied, or conditional.

9. Blames Others – Projects blame onto others, fatalistic, external locus of control, avoids personal responsibility for behavior, views self as "victim" instead of "victimizer," self-centered, sense of entitlement.

10. Chemical Abuse - Especially alcohol, opiates, amphetamines, crack, and hallucinogens (PCP, LSD), an angry drunk, dramatic personality/mood changes when under the influence.

11. Mental Health Problems Requiring In-Patient Hospitalization - Especially with arrest history for any offenses prior to hospitalization.

12. **History of Violence** - Towards self and others, actual physical force used to injure, harm, or damage. This element is the most significant in assessing individuals for potential dangerousness.

13. Odd/Bizarre Beliefs - Superstitious, magical thinking, religiosity, sexuality, violent fantasies (especially when violence is eroticized), delusions.

14. Physical Problems - Congenital defects, severe acne, scars, stuttering, any of which contribute to poor self-image, lack of self-esteem, and isolation. History of head trauma, brain damage/neurological problems.

15. Preoccupation With Violence Themes - Movies, books, TV, newspaper articles, magazines (detective), music, weapons collections, guns, knives, implements of torture, S & M, Nazi paraphernalia.

16. Pathological Triad/School Problems - Fire-setting, enuresis, cruelty to animals, fighting, truancy, temper tantrums, inability to get along with others, ejection of authority.

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