

Traits & Characteristics of Abusers

(Author Unknown)

Signs to Look For in an Abusive Personality

Before you or a loved one (sister, brother, daughter, son) becomes involved with someone who will be physically, emotionally and verbally abusive...you, she or he should be aware of the common behaviors that are seen in abusive people. Many victims do not realize that these behaviors are early warning signs of potential abuse. 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. [NOTE: In this handout, "he," "his," and "him" will refer to the abuser.]

In some cases, an abuser may only have a couple of these behaviors that the victim can recognize. But these behaviors may be much 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.

1. Jealousy: At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will always say that jealousy is a sign of love. On the contrary, jealousy has nothing to do with love; it is a sign of insecurity, of possessiveness and lack of trust. He will question you about whom you talk to, will accuse you of flirting, or be jealous of the time you spend with your family or friends. As the jealousy progresses, he may call or text 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 odd behaviors such as checking your car mileage or asking friends to watch you.
2. Controlling Behavior: At first, the abuser will explain that he does what he does because he is concerned about 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 from wherever, 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, and appearance.
3. Quick Involvement: Many people in abusive relationships dated or knew their abusive partners for less than six months before they got engaged, were married, or lived 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 the involvement or to break up.
4. Unrealistic Expectations: An abusive person will expect his partner to meet all his needs; he expects you to be the perfect 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 his emotional needs.
5. Isolation: The abusive person will try to cut you off from your 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 too close to 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, thinks 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 work or 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,*" or "*You are hurting me by not doing what I want you to do,*" or "*I can't help being angry.*" He actually chooses how he thinks or feels, but will use his feelings to manipulate you.
8. Hypersensitivity: An abusive person is easily insulted, and claims that his feelings are hurt when 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 siblings 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 sex, or he may want you to act out fantasies in which you are helpless. He may show little concern about your need for affection; and he may sulk or use anger to manipulate you into compliance with what he wants sexually.
11. Verbal Abuse: In addition to saying things that are meant to be cruel and hurtful, this behavior occurs when the abusive person degrades you, curses you, calls you names or makes fun of your accomplishments. He tells 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 explodes. Explosiveness and moodiness are typical of people who are abusive to their partners, and these behaviors are related to hypersensitivity.
13. Past Battering: This person may mention that he has hit girlfriends in the past but explains "*they made me do it.*" You may hear from relatives or your mutual friends that this person 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 their threats by saying, "*Everybody talks that way.*"
15. Breaking or Striking Objects: This behavior (breaking loved possessions) is used as a punishment, 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 recklessly

or at a high speed to scare you. Not only is this a sign of extreme emotional immaturity, but there is great danger when he thinks he has 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."*

Additionally, the following are other traits of a violent offender. He may –

- have low self esteem
- a low frustration tolerance
- believe all the myths about battering relationships
- be a traditionalist believing in male supremacy and the stereotyped masculine sex role in the family
- have severe stress reactions during which drinking and battering are used to cope
- not believe his violent behavior have negative consequences
- be preoccupied with violent themes, including (detective) books, movies, TV, newspaper articles, magazines, music, weapons collections, guns, knives, implement torture, S & M and Nazi paraphernalia
- have physical problems, including congenital defects, severe acne, scars, stuttering, any of which contribute to poor self-image, lack of self-esteem and isolation
- have a history of head trauma, or brain damage/neurological problems
- exhibit odd/bizarre beliefs, such as superstition, magical thinking, religiosity, sexuality, violent fantasies (especially when violence is eroticized) and delusions
- have mental health problems requiring in-patient hospitalization, especially with an arrest history for any offenses prior to hospitalization
- be a chemical abuser, especially alcohol, opiates, amphetamines, crack and hallucinogens (PCP, LSD)
- experienced altered consciousness, for example see red, 'blank out,' derealization or depersonalization (*"It's like I wasn't there" or "It was me, but not me"*), impaired reality testing, hallucinations

Abusive Expectations:

- The abuser places unreasonable demands on you and wants you to tend to his needs only and put everything else aside.
- He demands constant attention, or requires that you spend all your free time with him.
- But no matter how much you give, it's never enough.
- You are subjected to constant criticism, and you are constantly berated because you don't fulfill all his needs.

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