

## Warning signs of abusive personalities

While not all abusive people show the same traits, or display the tendencies to the same extent, if several behavioural traits are present, there is a strong tendency toward abusiveness. Generally, the more warning signs are present, the greater the likelihood of violence. In some cases, an abuser may have only a couple of behavioural traits that can

be recognised, but they are much exaggerated (e.g. extreme jealousy over ridiculous things). Often the domestic abuser will initially try to explain his/her behaviour as signs of their love and concern, and the victim may be flattered at first; as time goes on, the behaviours become more severe and serve to dominate, control and manipulate the victim.

**Jealousy;** the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will always say the jealousy is a sign of love. They may question you about whom you have spoken to or seen during the day, may accuse you of flirting, or be jealous of time you spend with family, friends, children or hobbies which do not include them. As the jealousy progresses they may call you frequently during the day or drop by unexpectedly. They may be unhappy about or refuse to let you work for fear you'll meet someone else, check the car mileage or ask friends to keep an eye on you. Jealousy is not proof of love. It's a sign of control and possessiveness.

**Controlling behaviour;** is often disguised or excused as concern for your safety, your emotional or mental health, the need to use your time well, or to ensure you make sensible decisions. Your abuser may be angry or upset if you are 'late' coming back from work, shopping, visiting friends, etc., even if you told them you would be later back than usual. Your abuser may question you closely about where you were, whom you spoke to, the content of every conversation you held, or why you did something they were not involved in. As this behaviour gets worse, you may not be allowed to make personal decisions about what you wear, where you go or how you spend your time or money. They may make you ask for permission to leave the house or room. Alternately, they may theoretically allow you your own decisions, but penalise you for making the wrong ones. Concern for our loved ones to a certain extent is normal - trying to control their every move is not.

**Quick involvement;** many victims of abuse dated or knew their abuser for less than six months before they were engaged or living together. The abuser will often claim 'love at first sight', that you are 'made for each other', or that you are the only person whom they could ever talk to so openly, feel so at home with, could understand them so well. They may tell you that they have never loved anyone so much or felt so loved by anyone so much before, when you have really only known each other for a short amount of time. They need someone

desperately, and will pressure you to commit to them or have sex before you feel the relationship has reached 'that stage'. They may also make you feel guilty for not committing yourself to them.

**Unrealistic expectations;** the abuser may expect you to be the perfect partner, mother, father, lover, and friend. They may tell you they can fulfil all your needs as lover, friend, and companion. Statements such as: "if you love me, I'm all you need" or "you're all I need" are common. Your abuser may expect you to provide everything for them emotionally, practically, financially or spiritually, and then blame you for not being perfect, or living up to expectation.

**Isolation;** the abuser may try to curtail your social interaction. They may prevent you from spending time with your friends or family and demand that you only go places 'together'. They may accuse you of being 'tied to your mother's apron strings', not be committed to the relationship, or view people who are your personal friends as 'causing trouble' or 'trying to put a wedge' between you. They may want to stop you having a phone, or car, by saying "why do we need two, we can share and save money", or not let you use the car, stop you from working or gaining further education or qualifications.

**Blame-shifting for problems;** very rarely will an abusive personality accept responsibility for any negative situation or problem. If they are unemployed, can't hold down a job, were thrown out of college or university, or fall out with their family, it is always someone else's fault, be it the boss, the government, or their mother. They may feel that someone is always doing them wrong, or out to get them. They may make mistakes then blame you for upsetting them or preventing them from doing as they wished to.

**Blame-shifting for feelings;** the abuser will deny feelings stem from within them but see them as reactions to your behaviour or attitude towards them. They may tell you that "you make me mad", "you're hurting me by not doing what I ask", or that they cannot help feeling mad, upset, etc. Feelings may be used to manipulate you, i.e. "I would not be angry if you didn't ..." Positive emotions will often also be seen as originating outside the abuser, but are more difficult to detect. Statements such as "You make me happy" or "You make me feel good about myself" are also signs that the abuser feels you are responsible for his sense of well-being. Either way, you become in their mind the cause of good and bad feelings and are therefore responsible for their emotional well-being and happiness. Consequently, you are also to blame for any negative feelings such as anger, upset or depression.

**Hypersensitivity;** most abusers are easily insulted or upset. They may claim their feelings are 'hurt' when they are really angry, or take unrelated comments as personal attacks. They may perceive normal set-backs (having to work additional hours, being asked to help out, receiving a parking fine, etc.) as grave personal injustices. They may view your preference for something which differs from their own as a criticism of their taste and therefore themselves (e.g. you want to watch a different TV programme or eat a different meal, etc.)

**Cruelty to children;** the abusers unrealistic expectations of their partner are often mirrored in their attitude toward children. They will think of children as 'small adults' and blame the children for not being responsible, having common sense or understanding. They may expect children to be capable far beyond their ability (e.g. is angry with a two-year old for wetting their pants or being sick on the carpet, waking at night, or being upset by nightmares) and will often meet out punishments for 'naughtiness' the child could not be aware of. Abusers may tease children until they cry, or punish children way beyond what could be deemed appropriate. They may not want children to eat at the table, expect them to stay quiet, or keep to their room all evening while they're at home. Since abusers want all of their partner's attention for themselves, they resent your spending time with the children or any normal demands and needs the children may have. There is a very strong link between domestic violence and child abuse.

**Cruelty to animals;** the abuser may punish animals brutally, be insensitive to their pain or suffering, or neglect to care for the animals to the point of cruelty, e.g. not feeding them all day, leaving them in areas they know will cause them suffering or distress. There is a strong correlation between cruelty to animals and domestic violence which is still being researched.

**Playful use of force in sex;** they may pressurise you to agree to forceful or violent acts during sex, or want to act out fantasies where you are helpless. A male abuser may let you know that the idea of 'rape' excites him. They may show little concern about whether you want to have intercourse and uses sulking or anger to manipulate you into compliance. Starting sex while you are sleeping, demanding sex when you are ill or tired, or refusing any form of intimacy unless you are willing to go 'all the way' can all be signs that they could be sexually abusive or sexually violent.

**Rigid gender roles;** abusers usually believe in stereotypical gender roles. A man may expect a woman to serve him; stay at home, obey him in all things - even things that are criminal in nature. A male abuser will often see women as inferior to men, more stupid, unable to be a whole person without a relationship. Female abusers may expect the man to provide for them entirely, shift the responsibility for her well-being onto him or heckle him as being 'not a real man' if he shows any weakness or emotion.

**Verbal abuse;** is a fairly important warning sign and really quite easy to spot once you can tell all the little ways in which you are being verbally abused. In addition to saying things that are meant to be cruel and hurtful, either in public or in private, this can include degrading remarks or running down any accomplishments. Often the abuser will tell you that you are 'stupid', could not manage without them. They may keep you up all night to 'sort this out once and for all' or even wake you at night to continue to verbally abuse you. The abuser may even say kindly things to your face, but speak badly about you to friends and family.

**Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde;** very rarely do abusers conform to the stereotypical image of a constantly harsh, nasty or violent person, either in public or in private. More frequently the abuser portrays a perfectly normal and pleasant picture to the outside world (often they have responsible jobs or are respected and important members of the local community) and reserves the abuse for you in the privacy of your own home. Nor are abusers always overtly abusive or cruel, but can display apparent kindness and consideration. This 'Jekyll and Hyde' tendency of the abuser serves to further confuse the victim, while protecting themselves from any form of suspicion from outsiders. Many victims describe 'sudden' changes in mood - one minute nice and the next explosive or hysterical, or one minute happy and the next minute sad. This does not indicate some special 'mental problem' but is typical of abusive personalities, and related to other characteristics such as hypersensitivity.

**Drink or substance abuse;** while neither drinking or the use of drugs are signs of an abusive personality, heavy drinking or drug abuse may be a warning sign and do increase the risks of abuse, especially violence, taking place. Often an abusive person will blame the drink for their abuse. However, a person who, knowing there is a risk they could be violent when drinking or on drugs, chooses to get drunk or high is in effect choosing to abuse. The link between substance abuse and domestic abuse is still being researched, and it is apparent that while neither alcohol nor drugs necessarily cause violence, they can escalate a verbal incident to a physical one due to the abuser being disinhibited and therefore increase the risk of violence.

**History of abuse, violence or sexual violence (male abusers);** very rarely is abuse or violence a one-off event: an abusive man will beat any woman he is with; a sexually abusive man will be abusive toward all their intimate partners. Situational circumstances do not make a person an abusive personality. Sometimes friends or family may try to warn you about the abuser. Sometimes the abuser may tell you themselves that they have hit or sexually assaulted someone in the past. However, they may further go on to explain that "they made me do it by ..." or in some other way not take responsibility and shift the blame on to the victim. They may tell you that it won't happen with you because "you love them enough to prevent it" or "you won't be stupid enough to wind me up that much". Once again, this is denying their own responsibility for the abuse, and shifting the responsibility for the relationship to remain abuse-free on to you. Past violence is one of the strongest pointers that abuse will occur.

**Negative attitude toward women (male abusers);** some men may tell you that you are different to all the women they have known before, who display a lack of respect of women generally or who talk negatively and disrespectfully of their previous wives or girlfriends. They may tell you that you are special, not like the others and that they consider themselves to be the luckiest man alive to have found the last decent woman. It is not likely to be long before they remember that you are a woman and don't deserve their respect.

**Threatening violence;** would obviously include any threat of physical force such as "If you speak to him/her again, I'll kill you", or "If any wife of mine acted like John's did, I'd give her a right seeing to". Threats are designed to manipulate and control you, to keep you in your place and prevent you making your own decisions. Most people do not threaten their mates, but an abuser will excuse this behaviour by saying "everybody talks like that", maintaining they are only saying this because the relationship or you are so important to them, tell you you're "over-sensitive" for being upset by such threats, or obviously want to hurt him/her. Threats can also be less overt, such as "If you leave me, I will kill myself", or "You are so wonderful, I will never let you go/couldn't live without you".

**Breaking or striking objects;** the abusive personality may break your treasured object, beat their fists on the table or chair or throw something at or past you. Breaking your things is often used as a punishment for some imagined misdeed on your part. Sometimes it will be justified by saying that now that you are with them, you don't need these items any more. Breaking your possessions also has the effect of de-personalising you, denying you your individuality or literally trying to break links to your past. Beating items of furniture or throwing objects will often be justified by saying you wound them up so much they lost control, once again shifting the blame for this behaviour on to you, but is actually used to terrorise you into submission. Only very immature or abusive people beat on objects in the presence of other people in order to threaten or intimidate them.

**Any force during an argument; BIG warning sign!** What starts off in early courtship as a bit of a push or a shove can turn into full blown beatings very quickly. An abuser may physically restrain you from leaving the room, lash out at you with their hand or another object, pin you against a wall or shout 'right in your face'. Basically any form of force used during an argument can be a sign that serious physical violence is a strong possibility.