

Sign 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/her behavior as signs of his/her 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.

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/she will question the other person about whom he/she talks to, accuses him/her of flirting, or be jealous of the time he/she spends with their family or friends. As the jealousy progresses, he/she may call frequently during the day or drop by unexpectedly. He/she 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.

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

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/she 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/she will pressure you to commit to the relationship in such a way that you may later feel guilty or that you are "letting him/her down" if you want to slow down involvement or break up.

Unrealistic Expectations: Abusive people will expect their partner to meet all their needs; he/she expects you to be the perfect boyfriend/girlfriend, the perfect friend or the perfect lover. He/she 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/her emotional needs.

Isolation: The abusive person will try to cut you off from all resources. He/she 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/her" and if you have friends of the same sex, he/she may accuse you of being gay.

Blames Others for Problems: He/she is chronically unemployed, someone is always waiting for him/her to do wrong or mess up or someone is always out to get him/her. He/she may make mistakes and blame you for upsetting him/her. He/she may accuse you of preventing him/her from concentrating on school. He/she will tell you that you are at fault for almost anything that goes wrong.

Blames Others for Feelings: He/she 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/she really makes the decisions about how he/she thinks or feels, but will use feelings to manipulate you. Hypersensitivity: An abusive person is easily insulted, and claims that their feelings are hurt when really he/she is very mad. He/she often takes the slightest setbacks as personal attacks. He/she 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.

Cruelty to Animals or Children: This is a person who punishes animals brutally or is insensitive to their pain and suffering, he/she may tease younger brothers or sisters until they cry. "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/she may want you to act out fantasies in which you are helpless. He/she is letting you know that the idea of sex is exciting. He/she may show little concern about whether you want affection and may sulk or use anger to manipulate you into compliance.

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/her. This may involve waking you up to verbally abuse you or not letting you go to sleep until you talk out an argument.

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

*** Past Battering: This person may say that he/she has hit boyfriends/girlfriends in the past but the other person "made them do it." You may hear from relatives or past boyfriends or girlfriends that the 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.

*** 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."

*** 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/her 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.

*** 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. They may hold you against the wall and say, "You are going to listen to me."

Additionally, the following are other traits of violent offenders.

He/she may -

- Have low self esteem, or 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 the violent behavior will have negative consequences
- Be preoccupied with violent themes, including books, movies, TV, newspaper articles, magazines (detective), music, weapons collections, guns, knives, implement torture, S & M and Nazi
- paranoia
- 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)
- Experience altered consciousness, for example see red, 'blank out,' derealization/depersonalization ("It's like I wasn't there" or "It was me, but not me"), impaired reality testing, hallucinations