



Signs of an Abusive Personality

While most people think of abuse as a male hurting a female, this role may be reversed or may even appear in same sex couples. Further, the relationship need not be a marital relationship. These traits are often seen in dating relationships as well. It is vital to be aware of the following traits of potential abusers to protect ourselves and those we love.

Jealousy – Jealousy has nothing to do with love; it’s a sign of possessiveness and a lack of trust. Examples of this trait in an abusive relationship include frequent calls during the day, becoming angry over time spent with family or friends, or even extreme behaviors such as checking car mileage.

Controlling Behavior – This category has a large range of behaviors involved. Examples include questioning, becoming angry over “lateness,” choosing clothing for the other person, controlling the money in the relationship, or even having to get permission to leave the room or home.

Quick Involvement – Many abusers pressure others into some sort of commitment, often VERY early in a relationship.

Unrealistic Expectations – Abusive people expect their partner to be perfect and meet all of his/her needs.

Isolation – The abusive person will try to cut off all resources. This behavior could range from keeping the partner away from friends and family, prohibiting work or school, or limiting use of a vehicle.

Blames Others for Problems – To the abuser, someone else is always the reason for his/her woes. Whether it is the overbearing boss, the scheming coworker, or the nagging partner, someone else will always be the cause of his/her troubles.

Blames Others for Feelings – We are all guilty of saying, “you make me angry,” but the abuser will take this to the next level. The abuser will use statements like this to manipulate and control his/her partner.

Hypersensitivity – An abuser is easily offended by the most mundane items. He/She will overreact to everyday annoyances such as being asked to work overtime, getting a traffic ticket, running late, or being asked to help with housework.

Cruelty to Animals or Children – Abusers typically will punish animals brutally, expect children to perform tasks that are above their capacity (punish a 2 year old for wetting a diaper), or tease children until they cry.

“Playful” Use of Force in Sex – The abusive person will want to act out “fantasies” where the other person is helpless. This person will also show little concern over whether the other person wants to have sex and will use anger or sulking to manipulate the other person into complying. Sometimes, the abuser will start having sex with a partner who is sleeping or demand sex of a partner who is ill or tired.

Verbal Abuse – Not only will the abuser say things to be hurtful or cruel, the abuser will also degrade, curse, or ridicule his/her partner.

Rigid Sex Roles – The abuser will typically be extremely adamant about who should be doing which tasks in the home. More often, this particular trait applies to abusive males or same sex relationships in which there is a clear delineation of roles. The female should obey, stay home, be inferior, be stupid, and rely totally on the male.

Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde – This trait is related to hypersensitivity of mood. An abuser’s mood will shift dramatically in the blink of an eye. One second the abuser is nice; the next, he/she is infuriated.

****The next four are considered to be battering behaviors. These are the precursors to full physical abuse of a partner.****

Past Battering – This person will have a history of hitting others. Relatives or ex’s may warn the partner that the person is abusive. However, situational circumstances do not make a person an abusive personality, for example, hitting someone in self-defense.

Threats of Violence – Any threat of physical force should be considered in this trait area. Threats may include “I’ll slap the taste out of your mouth,” “I’ll break your neck,” or “I’ll kill you.” Abusers will also attempt to excuse these threats by insisting that “everyone talks like that”.

Breaking or Striking Objects – Abusers will hit walls, throw objects, or break their partner’s prized possessions when they are angry. This is a sign of emotional immaturity as well as an extreme attempt to control, frighten, and punish their partner.

Any Force during an Argument – This behavior may include holding the partner down, physically restraining the partner from leaving the room, pushing, or shoving.

Information adapted from the Project for Victims of Family Violence, P.O. Box 2915, Fayetteville, Arkansas, retrieved from <http://www.indstate.edu/community/TeenTH/abusersigns.html>, on 6/1/2006

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