

SIGNS TO LOOK FOR IN AN ABUSIVE PERSONALITY

(Adapted from Lydia Walker, the [Project for Victims of Family Violence, Inc.](#), Fayetteville, Arizona)

Many people are interested in predicting whether someone may be physically abusive. Below is a list of behaviors that are commonly exhibited by people who beat their partners; the last four signs on the list are almost always seen only if the person is a batterer. In some cases, an abuser may have only a few behaviors that the victim can recognize, but they are particularly exaggerated (i.e. extreme jealousy over ridiculous things). Initially the abusive person will try to explain unacceptable behavior as signs of love or concern, and the victim may at first be flattered; but as time goes on, the behaviors become more severe and serve to dominate.

1. **JEALOUSY:** An abuser will explain away jealousy as a sign of love. Jealousy has nothing to do with love; it is a sign of insecurity and possessiveness. Abusers may question victims about who they talk to, accuse them of flirting/cheating, or act jealous of family, friends or children. As the jealous behavior progresses, abusers may contact the victim repeatedly during the day, or drop by unexpectedly. Abusers may refuse to let their victims work for fear they will meet someone else, or exhibit other strange behaviors (like checking car mileage or asking friends to spy on victims).
2. **CONTROLLING BEHAVIORS:** Abusers regularly state that they are merely concerned for the victim's safety, or just want to "improve" the victim to justify controlling behaviors. Abusers soon become angry if the victims are "late" coming home, or will question them closely about their whereabouts and socializing. As this behavior gets worse, abusers restrict their victims' personal decisions, such as what they wear, how they spend their money, etc.
3. **QUICK INVOLVEMENT:** Many victims dated or knew their abuser for less than six months before they were engaged or living together. Abusers tend to come on like whirlwinds (i.e., "you are the only person I could ever talk to," "I have never felt loved like this by anyone," etc.). Abusers may feel a desperate need for control, and may pressure their victims to commit to the relationship early.
4. **UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS:** Abusers become dependent on their victims for all needs, and expects them to be the perfect partner, parent, lover and friend. Abusers will say things like "If you love me, I'm all you need. You're all I need." The victim is expected to automatically know each emotional and physical need of the abuser.
5. **ISOLATION:** Abusers attempt to isolate their victims from personal and social resources (except for ones they can manipulate to their point-of-view). If she has men friends, she is a "whore"; if she has women friends, she is a lesbian; if she is close to family, she is tied to apron strings. Abusers claim that people who are supportive of their victim are troublemakers, and they may choose to live in the country without a phone, may not let their victim use the car, or may try to keep the victim from working or going to school.
6. **BLAMES OTHERS FOR PROBLEMS:** If the abuser is chronically unemployed, it is always someone else's fault. The abuser may make mistakes and then blame the victim for being distracting or upsetting. The victim is often blamed for anything and everything that goes wrong.
7. **BLAMES OTHERS FOR OWN FEELINGS:** The abuser will tell the victim "you make me mad," "you're hurting me by not doing what I ask," "I can't help being angry." The abuser will use feelings to manipulate the victim. Harder to recognize are claims that "you make me happy" (the message is "you control how I feel").
8. **HYPERSENSITIVITY:** Abusers are easily insulted and claim that feelings are "hurt" when actually they are really angry; abusers interpret the slightest resistance as a personal attack. Abusers will rant and rave about the injustice of things that have happened--things that are really just part of living, like being asked to work overtime, getting a traffic ticket, being told that something he does is annoying, being asked to help with chores.

9. **CRUELTY TO ANIMALS OR CHILDREN:** Abusers may punish animals brutally or be insensitive to their pain. They often expect children to be capable of doing things far beyond their ability (whips a two-year-old for wetting their diaper) or may tease young children until they cry; up to 60% of men who beat their partners also beat their children. Abusers often refuse to interact with the children, unless their purpose is to have the children take care of them, or gain social equity from public displays of parenting.
10. **"PLAYFUL" USE OF FORCE IN SEX:** Abusers will often use sexual scenarios requiring throwing their victim down or restraining them during sex, or they may want to act out fantasies where their victim is helpless. The idea of rape may excite the abuser, and they may show little concern about whether their victim wants sex. They will often use sulking or anger to manipulate the victim into compliance. The abuser may also start having sex with the victim while she is sleeping, or demand sex when she is ill or tired.
11. **VERBAL ABUSE:** In addition to saying things that are meant to be cruel and hurtful, abusers may verbally degrade their victims by cursing or diminishing their accomplishments. Abusers may tell their victim that they are stupid and unable to function on their own.
12. **RIGID SEX ROLES:** The male batterer expects a woman to serve him, and may require that she stay at home, that she obey in all things--even things that are criminal in nature. The male abuser sees women as inferior and unable to be a whole person without a relationship.
13. **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE:** Many victims are confused by their abuser's sudden change in mood; they will describe the abuser's behavior as "nice" one minute, but the next minute "explosive" or "crazy." Explosiveness and mood swings are typical of batterers and are related to other characteristics such as hypersensitivity.
14. **PAST BATTERING:** The batterer may admit to hitting previous partners, but will blame their former partner for provoking the attacks. The victim may hear from relatives or ex-spouses of previous abuse. The fact is a batterer will beat any partner; circumstances do not make a person abusive.
15. **THREATS OF VIOLENCE:** This includes any threat of physical force meant to control the victim (i.e., "I'll slap your mouth off," "I'll kill you," "I'll break your neck"). Most intimate partners do not threaten their mates, but abusers try to excuse their behavior by saying "everybody talks like that."
16. **BREAKING OR STRIKING OBJECTS:** This behavior is used as punishment (breaking loved possessions), but is mostly used to terrorize the victim into submission. The abuser may beat on tables with fists, or throw objects around or near the victim.