

## SIGNS THAT YOU'RE IN AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

<p><b>Your Inner Thoughts and Feelings</b></p> <p><b>Do you:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feel afraid of your partner much of the time?</li> <li>• avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?</li> <li>• feel that you can't do anything right for your partner?</li> <li>• believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?</li> <li>• wonder if you're the one who is crazy?</li> <li>• feel emotionally numb or helpless?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Your Partner's Belittling Behavior</b></p> <p><b>Does your partner:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• humiliate or yell at you?</li> <li>• criticize you and put you down?</li> <li>• treat you so badly that you're embarrassed for your friends or family to see?</li> <li>• ignore or put down your opinions or accomplishments?</li> <li>• blame you for his own abusive behavior?</li> <li>• see you as property or a sex object, rather than as a person?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Your Partner's Violent Behavior or Threats</b></p> <p><b>Does your partner:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have a bad and unpredictable temper?</li> <li>• hurt you, or threaten to hurt or kill you?</li> <li>• threaten to take your children away or harm them?</li> <li>• threaten to commit suicide if you leave?</li> <li>• force you to have sex?</li> <li>• destroy your belongings?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Your Partner's Controlling Behavior</b></p> <p><b>Does your partner:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• act excessively jealous and possessive?</li> <li>• control where you go or what you do?</li> <li>• keep you from seeing your friends or family?</li> <li>• limit your access to money, the phone, or the car?</li> <li>• constantly check up on you?</li> </ul>

## Abusers use a variety of tactics to manipulate you and exert their power:

- **Dominance** – Abusive individuals need to feel in charge of the relationship. They will make decisions for you and the family, tell you what to do, and expect you to obey without question. Your abuser may treat you like a servant, child, or even as his or her possession.
- **Humiliation** – An abuser will do everything he or she can to make you feel bad about yourself or defective in some way. After all, if you believe you're worthless and that no one else will want you, you're less likely to leave. Insults, name-calling, shaming, and public put-downs are all weapons of abuse designed to erode your self-esteem and make you feel powerless.
- **Isolation** – In order to increase your dependence on him or her, an abusive partner will cut you off from the outside world. He or she may keep you from seeing family or friends, or even prevent you from going to work or school. You may have to ask permission to do anything, go anywhere, or see anyone.
- **Threats** – Abusers commonly use threats to keep their partners from leaving or to scare them into dropping charges. Your abuser may threaten to hurt or kill you, your children, other family members, or even pets. He or she may also threaten to commit suicide, file false charges against you, or report you to child services.
- **Intimidation** – Your abuser may use a variety of intimidation tactics designed to scare you into submission. Such tactics include making threatening looks or gestures, smashing things in front of you, destroying property, hurting your pets, or putting weapons on display. The clear message is that if you don't obey, there will be violent consequences.
- **Denial and blame** – Abusers are very good at making excuses for the inexcusable. They will blame their abusive and violent behavior on a bad childhood, a bad day, and even on the victims of their abuse. Your abusive partner may minimize the abuse or deny that it occurred. He or she will commonly shift the responsibility on to you: Somehow, his or her violent and abusive behavior is your fault.



## *The cycle of violence in domestic abuse*

Domestic abuse falls into a common pattern, or cycle of violence:



- **Abuse** – Your abusive partner lashes out with aggressive, belittling, or violent behavior. The abuse is a power play designed to show you "who is boss."
- **Guilt** – After abusing you, your partner feels guilt, but not over what he's done. He's more worried about the possibility of being caught and facing consequences for his abusive behavior.
- **Excuses** – Your abuser rationalizes what he or she has done. The person may come up with a string of excuses or blame you for the abusive behavior—anything to avoid taking responsibility.
- **"Normal" behavior** — The abuser does everything he can to regain control and keep the victim in the relationship. He may act as if nothing has happened, or he may turn on the charm. This peaceful honeymoon phase may give the victim hope that the abuser has really changed this time.
- **Fantasy and planning** – Your abuser begins to fantasize about abusing you again. He spends a lot of time thinking about what you've done wrong and how he'll make you pay. Then he makes a plan for turning the fantasy of abuse into reality.
- **Set-up** – Your abuser sets you up and puts his plan in motion, creating a situation where he can justify abusing you.

Your abuser's apologies and loving gestures in between the episodes of abuse can make it difficult to leave. He may make you believe that you are the only person who can help him, that things will be different this time, and that he truly loves you. However, the dangers of staying are very real.

## **The Full Cycle of Domestic Violence: An Example**

A man **abuses** his partner. After he hits her, he experiences self-directed **guilt**. He says, "I'm sorry for hurting you." What he does not say is, "Because I might get caught." He then **rationalizes** his behavior by saying that his partner is having an affair with someone. He tells her "If you weren't such a worthless whore I wouldn't have to hit you." He then **acts contrite**, reassuring her that he will not hurt her again. He then **fantasizes** and reflects on past abuse and how he will hurt her again. He **plans** on telling her to go to the store to get some groceries. What he withholds from her is that she has a certain amount of time to do the shopping. When she is held up in traffic and is a few minutes late, he feels completely justified in assaulting her because "you're having an affair with the store clerk." He has just **set her up**.

### ***Recognizing the warning signs of domestic violence and abuse***

It's impossible to know with certainty what goes on behind closed doors, but there are some telltale signs and symptoms of emotional abuse and domestic violence. If you witness any warning signs of abuse in a friend, family member, or co-worker, take them very seriously.

### **General warning signs of domestic abuse**

People who are being abused may:

- Seem afraid or anxious to please their partner.
- Go along with everything their partner says and does.
- Check in often with their partner to report where they are and what they're doing.
- Receive frequent, harassing phone calls from their partner.
- Talk about their partner's temper, jealousy, or possessiveness.

### **Warning signs of physical violence**

People who are being physically abused may:

- Have frequent injuries, with the excuse of "accidents."
- Frequently miss work, school, or social occasions, without explanation.
- Dress in clothing designed to hide bruises or scars (e.g. wearing long sleeves in the summer or sunglasses indoors).

### **Warning signs of isolation**

People who are being isolated by their abuser may:

- Be restricted from seeing family and friends.
- Rarely go out in public without their partner.
- Have limited access to money, credit cards, or the car.

## **The psychological warning signs of abuse**

People who are being abused may:

- Have very low self-esteem, even if they used to be confident.
- Show major personality changes (e.g. an outgoing person becomes withdrawn).
- Be depressed, anxious, or suicidal.

## ***Speak up if you suspect domestic violence or abuse***

If you suspect that someone you know is being abused, speak up! If you're hesitating—telling yourself that it's none of your business, you might be wrong, or the person might not want to talk about it—keep in mind that expressing your concern will let the person know that you care and may even save his or her life.

## **Do's and Don't's**

<b>Do:</b>	<b>Don't:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask if something is wrong.</li> <li>• Express concern.</li> <li>• Listen and validate.</li> <li>• Offer help.</li> <li>• Support his or her decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wait for him or her to come to you.</li> <li>• Judge or blame.</li> <li>• Pressure him or her.</li> <li>• Give advice.</li> <li>• Place conditions on your support.</li> </ul>

Adapted from [NYS Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence](#)