

Signs to Look for in an Abusive Personality, *from the Project for Victims of Family Violence, Inc., Fayetteville, Az*

Many women are interested in knowing ways that they can predict whether someone may be physically abusive. Below are a list of behaviors that are seen in 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, a batterer may have only a couple of behaviors that the woman can recognize, but they are very exaggerated (I.e., extreme jealousy over ridiculous things). Initially the batterer will try to explain unacceptable behavior as signs of love and concern, and a woman may be flattered at first; but as time goes on, the behaviors become more severe and serve to dominate.

1. 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 insecurity and possessiveness. The abuser will question her about who she talks to, accuse her of flirting, or be jealous of time she spends with family, friends, or children. As the jealousy progresses, the abuser may call her repeatedly at work (or home) or drop by unexpectedly. The abuser may refuse to let her work for fear she will meet someone else, or exhibit other strange behaviors (like checking her car mileage or asking friends to watch her).

2. Controlling Behavior: At first the batterer will say that this behavior is because of concern for the woman's safety, her need to use her time well, or her need to make good decisions. The abuser will be angry if the woman is "late" coming back from the store or an appointment, or will question her closely about where she went, and who she talked to. As this behavior gets worse, the abuser may not let the women make personal decisions about the house, her clothing or going to church, may keep all the money or even require she ask permission to leave the house or room.

3. Quick Involvement: Many battered women dated or knew their abuser for less than six months before they were engaged or living together. The abuser comes on like a whirlwind, "you are the only person I could ever talk to, I have never felt loved like this by anyone." The abuser's need is desperate and will pressure the woman to commit to the relationship.

4. Unrealistic Expectations: The abuser becomes dependent on the woman for all needs. He expects her to be the perfect wife, mother, lover, and friend. The abuser will say things like "If you love me, I am all you need, you are all I need." The woman is automatically expected to know each emotional and physical need of the abuser.

5. Isolation: The abuser attempts to isolate the woman from all personal and social resources. 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. The abuser claims that people who are supportive of her are troublemakers and may want to live in the country without a phone, or may not let her use the car, or try to keep her 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 woman for being distracting or upsetting. The woman may be blamed for anything that goes wrong.

7. Blames Others for own Feelings: The abuser will tell the woman "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 woman. Harder to recognize are claims such as "you make me happy". The message in each case is "you control how I feel".

8. Hypersensitivity: The abuser is easily insulted and claims that feelings are "hurt" when actually s/he's really angry, or the abuser interprets the slightest setbacks as personal attacks. The abuser 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: The batterer may punish animals brutally or be insensitive to their pain; or may 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. (60% of men who beat their partners, also beat their children). The abuser may refuse to interact with the children by not allowing them to eat at the table or expecting them to stay in their rooms in the evenings.

10. "Playful" Use of Force in Sex : The abuser may like to throw the woman down and hold her during sex, or may want to act out fantasies during sex where the woman is helpless. The idea of rape may excite the abuser. The abuser may show little concern about whether the woman wants to have sex and use sulking or anger to manipulate her into compliance. The abuser may start having sex with the woman 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, the abuser may verbally degrade the woman by cursing her or diminishing her accomplishments. The abuser may tell her that she's stupid and unable to function on her own. This may involve waking her up to verbally abuse her or not letting her sleep.

12. Rigid Sex Roles: The 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 abuser sees women as inferior, and unable to be a whole person without a relationship.

13. Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde: Many women 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 partner for provoking the attacks. The woman may hear from relatives or ex-spouses of previous abuse. The fact is, a batterer will beat any partner: situational circumstances do not make a person abusive.

15. Threats of Violence: This would include any threat of physical force meant to control the woman. "I'll kill myself" "I'll slap your mouth off," "I'll kill you," "I'll break your neck." Most intimate partners do not threaten their mates, but a batterer will try to excuse this 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 woman into submission. The abuser may beat on tables with fists, throw objects around or near the woman. Again, this is remarkable behavior in that only immature people beat on objects in the presence of other people in order to threaten them.

17. Any Force During an Argument : This may involve a batterer holding a woman down, physically restraining her from leaving the room, or pushing or shoving. (The abuser may hold the woman against a wall and say "you're going to listen to me").