

# Early Warning Signs of Abusive or Potentially Abusive Relationships



## An important note:

Abusers and victims can be of either gender and abuse is present in both heterosexual and same-sex relationships, but the vast majority of cases (95%) involve men abusing women.

### He is controlling and possessive....

- ✓ She is restricted in communicating with others; her use of phone, mail, or e-mail is monitored.
- ✓ She is discouraged or forbidden to see friends or family.
- ✓ He is intensely jealous of her interactions with other men.
- ✓ He invades her privacy—her home or room, her diary, her mail, her e-mail, her possessions.
- ✓ He grills her about what she did at work or at school.
- ✓ He continually asks where she has been and what she has been doing.
- ✓ He controls finances and decision-making.
- ✓ He refuses to accept her termination of the relationship.

### He seems to be two different people....

- ✓ He has a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality, often showing a charming, charismatic side to others.
- ✓ He seems deeply penitent, sorrowful, and loving after an emotionally or physically violent episode.

### He is desperate and extreme about her....

- ✓ He may push for commitments too early in the relationship.
- ✓ He threatens to kill her or himself if she leaves him.
- ✓ He says he cannot live without her or she cannot live without him.
- ✓ He seems obsessed with having her for himself.

### He is verbally abusive....

- ✓ He puts her down, privately or publicly.
- ✓ He plays on her guilt or her past love for him.
- ✓ He makes her question her sanity or accuses her of being crazy.
- ✓ He insults her intelligence, her body, or her looks.

### He speaks negatively about women....

- ✓ He puts down her friends.
- ✓ He talks about the inferiority of women and makes degrading jokes about women.

### He is violent....

- ✓ He loses his temper easily over small things; his anger seems frightening or out of proportion.
- ✓ He grabs her, twists her arm, pushes her, pulls her into the car, and otherwise uses physical force.
- ✓ He is violent toward her pets or cruel to animals in general.
- ✓ He was physically violent to a former partner.
- ✓ He throws things, kicks things, breaks things.
- ✓ He demands sex; he forces her or persistently urges her to perform sex acts without her consent.

### He disowns responsibility....

- ✓ He denies being verbally or physically abusive.
- ✓ He blames her or someone else for the abuse, “she made me do it” or “she drove me to it.”
- ✓ He excuses the abuse on the grounds of his great love for her.

***If you are involved with someone who displays several of these characteristics, ask yourself the questions on the other side of this page.***

# Ask Yourself

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If you are involved with someone who displays several of the characteristics mentioned on the preceding page, ask yourself these questions about your relationship, filling in the name of your partner:

- Are there times when you do not state your opinion in an argument or discussion because you feel intimidated?
- Are you ever afraid that you will be hit?
- Do you participate in activities that you do not enjoy, because you are afraid to say that you would prefer to do something else for fear of the reaction?
- Do you feel that you are not listened to and that your opinion is not valued?
- Do you put your values aside in order to please the other person?
- Does solving the other person's problems or relieving their pain bolster your self-esteem?
- Do you find that feeling good about yourself stems from receiving approval from \_\_\_\_\_?
- Do you feel that your mental attention is focused on pleasing and/or protecting \_\_\_\_\_?
- Are you more in touch with how \_\_\_\_\_ feels rather than how you feel?
- Are you more aware of what \_\_\_\_\_ wants rather than what you want?
- Does your fear of rejection from \_\_\_\_\_ determine what you do or say?
- Do you feel powerless, as if nothing you do makes a difference to the relationship?
- Do you expect yourself always to be strong, good, perfect, and happy?

If you checked:

1-2 boxes:           Talk to your partner about how their actions make you feel. Be observant of other warning signs.

3-4 boxes:           This relationship will probably get worse. Tell a friend or family member AND a professional about your situation—either a counselor or an administrator.

5 or more boxes:    You may be in danger and you should talk to a parent or counselor immediately. **Do not wait.**

# How Can I Tell if My Friend is in a Potentially Abusive Relationship?











- Does your friend make excuses for the things that happen to them and/or others?
- Does your friend speak of the inferiority of women?
- Does your friend accept responsibility and take the blame for the abuse, verbal or physical?
- Do you notice a decline in your friend's self-esteem?
- Does your friend make significant lifestyle changes to benefit or appease the other person?
- Does your friend have bruises or seem physically hurt?
- Do you notice a sudden change in your friend's values and/or beliefs?
- Does your friend have recurring, non-specific aches, pains, or ailments, which can signify stress?
- Does your friend want to end the relationship, but does not because of fear of retaliation?

*If you answered yes to any of these questions, your friend might be in a potentially abusive relationship.*

## What Can You Do?

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### Do's and Do Not's for Helping a Friend Who Is Involved in a Potentially Abusive Relationship

- Do not make accusations or interrogate by saying, "He's abusing you, isn't he?"  
 Do open the door to communication with caring comments such as "I'm concerned about you."
- Do not be offended if your friend withdraws from your relationship. This is a common reaction for someone in an abusive relationship.  
 Do be patient.
- Do not accuse your friend of being blind for not seeing the warning signs.  
 Do help her recognize the abusive behavior for what it is and that it is not normal.
- Do not allow your friend to blame himself or herself.  
 Do tell your friend, over and over, that they do not deserve to be mistreated.
- Do not tell your friend to leave the relationship. This will likely push your friend away from you.  
 Do tell your friend that you are worried for their safety, self-esteem, and self-respect. Tell your friend that they deserve better.
- Do not threaten your friend with negative consequences if they do not leave the relationship, such as you will not be friends with them if they stay in the relationship.  
 Do let your friend know that you will be there for them through this difficult time.
- Do not put your friend down by calling the partner names.  
 Do help your friend to realize that although there are good things about the relationship, she/he is paying a heavy price.
- Do not put yourself in danger.  
 Do get advice from a relationship violence expert if you think the boyfriend/girlfriend is dangerous.
- Do not force your friend to tell a parent or a counselor.  
 Do encourage your friend to tell someone that she trusts. If your friend does not do this, you should consider finding someone to talk to that you trust.
- Do not assume that if they break-up that your friend is fine.  
 Do offer continued support and keep in close contact through times of loneliness and fear so that you can help your friend resist the urge to go back to the relationship.