

Warning Signs of an Abuser

Before an abuser starts physically assaulting his victim, he typically demonstrates his abusive tactics through certain behaviors. The following are five major warning signs and some common examples:

Charm

Abusers can be very charming. In the beginning, they may seem to be Prince Charming or a Knight in Shining Armor. He can be very engaging, thoughtful, considerate and charismatic. He may use that charm to gain very personal information about her. He will use that information later to his advantage.

For example; he will ask if she has ever been abused by anyone. If she says, "yes", he will act outraged that anyone could treat a woman that way. Then when he becomes abusive, he will tell her no one will believe her because she said that before and it must be her fault or two people would not have hit her.

Another example; he may find out she experimented with drugs in her past. He will then threaten that if she tells anyone about the abuse he will report her as a drug abuser and she will lose her children. The threat to take away her children is one of the most common threats abusers use to maintain power and control over their victims.

Isolation

Abusers isolate their victims geographically and socially. Geographic isolation includes moving the victim from her friends, family and support system (often hundreds of miles); moving frequently in the same area and/or relocating to a rural area.

Social isolation usually begins with wanting the woman to spend time with him and not her family, friends or co-workers. He will then slowly isolate her from any person who is a support to her. He dictates whom she can talk to; he tells her she cannot have contact with her friends or family.

Jealousy

Jealousy is a tool abusers use to control the victim. He constantly accuses her of having affairs. If she goes to the grocery store, he accuses her of having an affair with the grocery clerk. If she goes to the bank, he accuses her of having an affair with the bank teller. Abusers routinely call their victims a whore or a slut.

Emotional Abuse

The goal of emotional abuse is to destroy the victim's self-esteem. He blames her for his violence, puts her down, calls her names and makes threats against her. Over time, she no longer believes she deserves to be treated with respect and she blames herself for his violence. For some survivors of domestic violence, the emotional abuse may be more difficult to heal from than the physical abuse.

Control

Abusers are very controlled and very controlling people. In time, the abuser will control every aspect of the victim's life: where she goes, how she wears her hair, what clothes she wears, whom she talks to. He will control the money and access to money. Abusers are also very controlled people. While they appear to go into a rage or be out of control we know they are very much in control of their behavior.

The following are the reasons we know his behaviors are not about anger and rage:

- He does not batter other individuals - the boss who does not give him time off or the gas station attendant that spills gas down the side of his car. He waits until there are no witnesses and abuses the person he says he loves.
- If you ask an abused woman, "can he stop when the phone rings or the police come to the door?" She will say "yes". Most often when the police show up, he is looking calm, cool and collected and she is the one who may look hysterical. If he were truly "out of control" he would not be able to stop himself when it is to his advantage to do so.
- The abuser very often escalates from pushing and shoving to hitting in places where the bruises and marks will not show. If he were "out of control" or "in a rage" he would not be able to direct or limit where his kicks or punches land.