

EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF POTENTIAL ABUSE

Many of the behaviors that society socializes women to interpret as caring, attentive, passionate and romantic can actually be warning signs of abuse. **Note that one sign alone does not always mean that abuse will follow, nor will these signs always appear in the beginning of a relationship.**

TOO MUCH TOO SOON: Partner pushes for instant closeness and does not allow relationship to grow at a pace that is comfortable to you.

Examples: Partner praises you constantly and puts you on a pedestal. They want to live together immediately. Partner wants to care for your children and disciplines them early in relationship (instead of honoring your role as their parent).

Initially, you may feel swept off your feet. Yet, this shows your partner's lack of respect for boundaries.

CONFUSION: They change expectations or guidelines, thus keeping you guessing how to please them.

Examples: Saying they want you to work, but criticizing every job opening you apply for. Wanting to go out to dinner when you spent all day preparing their favorite meal.

INTRUSIVE AND CONTROLLING: Partner consistently wants to know your whereabouts, who you were with, where you were going, when you were coming home.

Examples: Constant phone calls, showing up at friend's homes unexpectedly. Initially, this may make you feel missed and cared for, but actually, these are signs of suspicion and distrust.

ISOLATION: Partner insists on spending all or the majority of your time together, cutting you off from friends and family, making fun of your interests in other activities.

Examples: Calling your friends derogatory names ("sluts", "stupid"); discouraging you from keeping in touch with family or friends; discouraging you from doing activities apart. Not providing child care.

Initially, this may make you feel wanted and needed because of all the time and attention devoted to you. Actually, this cuts down your resources (family, friends), so when you need them, they may not be there for you. Do they respect your need to have space or have time alone?

POSSESSIVENESS AND JEALOUSY: Partner constantly accuses you of sexual interactions with anyone in your life (friends, teachers, bosses, counselors, etc.). Accuses you of flirting; monitors how you look and what you wear.

Examples: Makes statements like, "I want you to be all mine", "I don't want any one else looking at you", "You look like a whore with that make up on".

Initially, jealousy may seem like a demonstration of partner's love, but it actually demonstrates partner's willingness to treat you like an object, or a piece of property. Uses jealousy as an excuse to isolate.

PRONE TO ANGER: Partner is easily angered, has rapid mood swings, unpredictable behavior; anger is out of proportion to the incident.

Example: Partner's anger is directed toward a pet, possessions, objects. Partner may kick the dog, destroy something of yours, rage at you if you're five minutes late. It is important not to ignore what may seem like even small overreactions. It is not acceptable for someone to use aggression to get their point across, regardless of how angry they are, or how they've dealt with their anger in the past.

UNKNOWN PAST & RESPECT FOR WOMEN: How has your partner treated previous girlfriends? Does your partner use derogatory or disrespectful language about women in general (bitches, whores, sluts, etc.)? Does your partner have stereotypical beliefs about gender roles?

Examples: Partner makes statements like, "she's got nice tits", or "women are good for just one thing"; or does things like pinch your body parts in a humiliating or uncomfortable way. Partner is physically and/or emotionally abusive to other women (their mother, ex-girlfriend). Blames past partners for all problems.

It is important to take the "mystery" out of your partner's past, like talking to partner's former girlfriends. Be in touch with your feelings -- how do you feel when your partner degrades women? By degrading women, your partner is also degrading you.

SELF-CENTERED: Partner always focuses on their own wants and needs. They ignore your wishes.

Examples: Orders for both of you at restaurants. Interrupts you when you are speaking. Decides that you will go to a movie that you clearly do not want to see. Tells you what you want (without asking you what you want).

DOUBLE STANDARDS: Partner expects others (and you) to live by their standards, yet he/she doesn't live by them.

Examples: Buys an expensive stereo, but criticizes you for buying new shoes. Calls you a slut for having slept with your partner, yet they have slept with many partners.

ALCOHOL & DRUG USE: While alcohol and drug abuse doesn't cause a person to be abusive, these problems often coexist. If they are engaging in drug abuse (an unhealthy behavior), there is a strong tendency for them to also be involved in other unhealthy behaviors, such as abuse. Additionally, drugs and alcohol can decrease a person's inhibitions about using violent behavior.

Examples: Hides alcohol/drug use. Makes excuses why they need to drink or why it is okay. They had a bad day so they deserve to celebrate.

BLAMES OTHERS: Partner doesn't accept responsibility for their actions.

Examples: Blames police for their DUI or domestic violence arrest. Says you provoked them into yelling, pushing.

INAPPROPRIATE SEXUAL BEHAVIOR OR DEMANDS: Partner pushes you to engage in behavior that is uncomfortable or painful.

Examples: Not allowed to use birth control. You only have sex when they want it.

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If you think you are in an abusive relationship:

Above all, trust your gut feelings and intuition. If you feel uncomfortable, be cautious. Take your time and check out your thoughts and feelings with supportive people.

Be aware if you are making excuses for your partner's behavior or if you are minimizing his/her past. Discuss with a supportive person what warning signs may be difficult for you to acknowledge.

Know that abusive people choose to use manipulation, intimidation, and abuse to gain power and control over their partner. Pointing out these warning signs to an abusive person will not change them. In fact, they will probably deny them or accuse you of being abusive. Use caution, as they may become violent when confronted with information that challenges their control.