Are You in an Abusive Relationship?

There are many signs of an abusive relationship. The most telling sign is fear of your partner. If you feel like you have to walk on eggshells around your partner—constantly watching what you say and do in order to avoid a blow-up—chances are your relationship is unhealthy and abusive. Other signs that you may be in an abusive relationship include a partner who belittles you or tries to control you, and feelings of self-loathing, helplessness, and desperation.

To determine whether your relationship is abusive, answer the questions below. The more "yes" answers, the more likely it is that you are in an abusive relationship. As you look over the following questions, think about how you are being treated and how you treat your partner. Remember, when one person scares, hurts or continually puts down the other person, it's abuse.

**Does your partner...**

- Humiliate you?
- Embarrass or make fun of you in front of your friends or family?
- Deny your feelings?
- Criticize you and put down your accomplishments or goals?
- Call you hurtful names?
- Make you feel like you are unable to make decisions?
- Use intimidation or threats to make you do things you don’t want to do?
- Force you to have sex?
- Hit walls, throw things, try to scare you?
- Tell you that you are nothing without them?
- Threaten to hurt you, or treat you roughly—grab, push, pinch, shove or hit you?
- Have a bad or unpredictable humor?
- Act excessively jealous and possessive?
- Call you several times a night, constantly text you, or show up to make sure you are where you said you would be?
- Accuse you of cheating or sleeping around?
- Isolate you from your friends or family?
- Use drugs or alcohol as an excuse for saying hurtful things or abusing you?
- Blame you for their own abusive behavior?
- Make you feel like there "is no way out" of the relationship?
- Destroy your belongings?
- Threaten to commit suicide if you leave?

**Do You...**

- Sometimes feel scared of how your partner will act?
- Avoid certain topics out of fear of angering your partner?
• Constantly make excuses to other people for your partner’s behavior?
• Believe that you can help your partner change if only you changed something about yourself?
• Try not to do anything that would cause conflict or make your partner angry?
• Feel like nothing you do will ever be good enough?
• Believe that you deserve to be hurt or mistreated?
• Always do what your partner wants you to do instead of what you want?
• Stay with your partner because you are afraid of what your partner would do if you broke up?
• Wonder if you are the one who is crazy?
• Feel emotionally numb and helpless?

Understanding Emotional Abuse

When people think of domestic abuse, they often picture battered women who have been physically assaulted. But not all abusive relationships involve violence. Just because you’re not battered and bruised doesn’t mean you’re not being abused. Many individuals suffer from emotional abuse, which is no less destructive. Unfortunately, emotional abuse is often minimized or overlooked—even by the person being abused.

The aim of emotional abuse is to chip away at your feelings of self-worth and independence. If you’re the victim of emotional abuse, you may feel that there is no way out of the relationship or that without your abusive partner you are nothing.

Emotional abuse includes verbal abuse such as yelling, name-calling, blaming, and shaming. Isolation, intimidation, and controlling behavior also fall under emotional abuse. Additionally, abusers who use emotional or psychological abuse often throw in threats of physical violence or other repercussions if you don’t do what they want.

You may think that physical abuse is far worse than emotional abuse, since physical violence can send you to the hospital and leave you with scars. But, the scars of emotional abuse are very real, and they run deep. In fact, emotional abuse can be just as damaging as physical abuse—sometimes even more so.

The cycle of relationship violence

Relationship 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.

Source: [Helpguide.org](http://Helpguide.org)

### What to Do...

If *you* are caught in an abusive relationship, know that help is available. You are not alone, and there are people waiting to help.

If you suspect that *someone you know* is being abused, do not hesitate to express your concern and offer to help. Talk in private and let your friend know that you're concerned. Point out the things you've noticed that make you worried. Tell the person that you're there, whenever your friend feels ready to talk. Listen without judgment and validate your friend's feelings and experiences. Reassure the person that you'll keep whatever is said between the two of you, and that you'll help in any way you can. Reach out for help.

Further information:

- [Help for Abused and Battered Women](http://Helpguide.org)
- [Help for Abused Men](http://Helpguide.org)

Sources:
- [The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](http://Helpguide.org)
- [Helpguide.org](http://Helpguide.org)