

Signs to Look for in a Battering Personality

Lydia D. Walker

Many women are interested in knowing if there are any warning signs that someone is an abuser. There is no typical victim or perpetrator. Any woman can be battered regardless of age, race, nationality, sexual orientation, educational background, or **income**. Battering almost always occurs with a man abusing a woman. However, violence can exist in other domestic relationships as well; lesbian battering and older parents beaten by their adult children are examples.*

Below is a list of behaviors seen in people who beat their partners. If the person has three or more of these behaviors, there's indeed a strong potential for physical violence. In some cases, a batterer might have only a couple of behaviors that are quite strong (e.g., extreme jealousy). In the beginning of a relationship, the batterer will try to "explain" these behaviors as "love" and "concern." However, as time goes on, these behaviors become more extreme and serve to establish, keep, and strengthen power and control over the victim.

*The use of "he" for the abuser and "she" for the victim is used to facilitate reading and to emphasize the circumstances of most battering. This wording is not meant to discount the various situations in which domestic violence occurs.

1. **JEALOUSY:** At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will say jealousy is a sign of love; jealousy has nothing to do with love, it's a sign of possessiveness and lack of trust. The abuser will question the woman about to whom she talks, accuse her of flirting, or be jealous of the time she spends with family, friends, and/or children. As the "jealous" behavior progresses, the abuser may call her frequently or unexpectedly drop by her home/workplace. The abuser may refuse to let her work saying he's "afraid" she'll meet someone else, or he may do strange things such as checking her car mileage or asking friends to watch her.
2. **CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR:** At first, the batterer may say this behavior is because of concern for the woman's safety and well-being. The abuser will be angry if the woman is "late" coming back from somewhere and will closely question her about where she went, to whom she spoke, etc. As this behavior gets worse, the abuser may not let the woman make personal decisions about the house, her clothing, or going to church/temple; he may keep all the money or even make her ask permission to leave the house or the room.
3. **QUICK INVOLVEMENT:** Most battered women dated or knew the abuser for less than six months (many for less than three months) before they were married, living together, or engaged. An abuser comes on like a whirlwind claiming "you're the only person I've ever been able to talk to," "I've never felt loved like this by anyone." The abuser will pressure the woman to commit to the relationship in such a way that later she may feel very guilty or feel she is "letting him down" if she wants to slow down involvement or break off the relationship.

4. **UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS:** Abusive people will expect their partner to meet all of their needs; the abuser expects the woman to be the perfect wife, mother, lover, and friend; abusers will say things like “if you love me, I’m all you need—you’re all I need.” She is supposed to take care of everything for the abuser emotionally and in the home. No matter how efficient/good she is, however, she is never good enough.
5. **ISOLATION:** The abusive person tries to cut the woman off from all resources and supports. If she has men friends, she’s a “whore;” if she has women friends, she’s a “lesbian;” if she’s close to her family, she’s “tied to the apron strings.” The abuser accuses people who are the woman’s supports of “causing trouble.” The abuser may want to live in the country without a phone, may not let the woman use the car or have one that is reliable, or may try to keep the woman from working, going to school, or going to spiritual/religious meetings.
6. **BLAMES OTHERS FOR PROBLEMS:** If the abuser is chronically unemployed, someone is “out to get him,” someone is always trying to do him wrong. The abuser may make mistakes and then blame the woman for upsetting him or keeping him from concentrating. The abuser will tell the woman she is at fault for almost anything that goes wrong.
7. **BLAMES OTHERS FOR FEELINGS:** The abuser will tell the woman “you make me mad,” “you’re hurting me by not doing what I tell you,” “I can’t help being angry.” The abuser really makes the decision about what he thinks and feels, but will use “feelings” to manipulate the woman. Less obvious are claims such as “only you can make me happy, and “you control how I feel.”
8. **HYPERSENSITIVITY:** An abuser is easily insulted, claiming his feelings are hurt when he is really mad, or taking the slightest setbacks as personal attacks. The abuser will rant and rave about the injustice of things that happen—things that are really just a part of life, like being asked to work overtime, getting a traffic ticket, being told a behavior is annoying, being expected/asked to help with chores.
9. **CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AND/OR CHILDREN:** An abuser often brutally punishes animals, is insensitive to their pain and suffering, and/or may kill them. The abuser may expect children to do things beyond their ability (spanks a two year old for wetting their diaper). The abuser may not want children to eat at the table or will expect them to stay in their room all evening when he’s at home.
10. **“PLAYFUL” USE OF FORCE IN SEX:** An abuser may like to throw the woman down or hold her down during sex. He may want to act out fantasies during sex in which the woman is helpless and will let the woman know the idea of rape is exciting. The abuser may show little concern about whether the woman wants to have sex and will use sulking behavior to manipulate her or

anger to pressure 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 meant to be cruel and hurtful, this can be seen when the abuser degrades the woman, curses her, and/or runs down her accomplishments. The abuser will tell the woman she is stupid and unable to function without him. This may involve waking the woman up to verbally abuse her or not letting her sleep.
 12. **RIGID SEX ROLES:** The abuser may expect the woman to serve him, perhaps saying the woman must stay at home or saying she must obey in all things---even things criminal in nature. The abuser will see women as inferior, responsible for menial tasks, stupid, and unable to be a whole person without a relationship.
 13. **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE:** Many women are confused by their abuser's "sudden" mood changes---they may think the abuser has some mental problem because one minute the abuser is really nice and the next minute he's exploding. Explosiveness and moodiness are typical of people who abuse their partners; these behaviors serve to intimidate and frighten the victim and are reflections of the abuser's alternate use of threat and manipulation to establish and maintain power and control.
- *****The following four "signs" are not really "signs;" these are behaviors found in those who are certainly batterers*****
14. **PAST BATTERING:** An abuser may say he's hit women in the past, but it was the woman's fault or it was only one time. The woman may hear from relatives or ex-partners the person is abusive. A batterer will beat any woman he is with if the woman is with him long enough for control to be established and violence to begin; situational circumstances do not make a person abusive.
 15. **THREATS OF VIOLENCE:** This includes any threat of physical force meant to control the woman: "I'll slap your mouth off," "I'll break your neck," "I'll make you sorry you were ever born," "I'll kill you." Non-violent people do not talk like this to their partners, but batterers will try to excuse these kinds of threats by saying "everybody talks like that."
 16. **STRIKING OR BREAKING OBJECTS:** This behavior can be used as punishment (breaking loved possessions), but mostly it is used to terrorize the woman into submission. The abuser may beat on tables with his fist, throw objects around or near the woman, or put his hand through the wall. Again, this is very remarkable behavior and should never be minimized---there is great danger when someone thinks they "have the right" to punish or frighten a partner.

17. **ANY FORCE DURING AN ARGUMENT:** This may involve a batterer holding a woman down, physically restraining her from leaving a room, or pushing/shoving her. The abuser may hold the woman against the wall and say "you're going to stand here and listen to me"! Many batterers in an attempt to deny or minimize past abuse will "tell stories" in which they "had to sit on a woman or hold her down" "for her own good." These behaviors are found in the second level of the progression of abuse in domestic violence.