

Warning signs of abuse

What Are the Signs of Domestic Abuse?

They're not always as obvious as you might think. That's because domestic abuse is about controlling someone's mind and emotions as much as hurting their body. Being abused can leave you scared and confused. It can be hard for you to see your partner's actions for what they really are.

Usually, physical abuse isn't what comes first. The abuse can creep up slowly. A putdown here or there. An odd excuse to keep you away from family or friends. The violence often ramps up once you've been cut off from other people. By then, you feel trapped.

Signs of Abuse

If you're afraid of your partner, that's a big red flag. You may be scared to say what you think, to bring up certain topics, or to say no to sex. No matter the reason, fear has no place in a healthy relationship.

If you feel like you're being abused, there's a good chance you may be, and it's worth getting help. Keep that in mind as you think about these signs:

Your partner bullies, threatens, or controls you:

- Accuses you of having an affair
- Blames you for abuse
- Criticizes you
- Tells you what to wear and how you should look
- Threatens to kill you or someone close to you
- Throws things or punches walls when angry
- Yells at you and makes you feel small

Your partner controls your money:

- Keeps cash and credit cards from you
- Puts you on an allowance and makes you explain every dollar you spend
- Keeps you from working whatever job you want
- Steals money from you or your friends
- Won't let you have money for basic needs like food and clothes

Your partner cuts you off from family and friends:

- Keeps close tabs on where you go and whom you go with
- Makes you ask for an OK to see friends and family
- Embarrasses you in front of others, and it makes you want to avoid people

Your partner physically abuses you:

- Abandons you in a place you don't know
- Attacks you with weapons
- Keeps you from eating, sleeping, or getting medical care
- Locks you in or out of your house
- Punches, pushes, kicks, bites, pulls hair

Your partner sexually abuses you:

- Forces you to have sex
- Makes you dress in a sexual way
- Makes you feel like you owe them sex
- Tries to give you an STD
- Won't use condoms or other birth control

Signs Someone You Know Is Being Abused

Keep an eye out for things like:

- Excuses for injuries
- Personality changes, like low self-esteem in someone who was always confident
- Constantly checking in with their partner
- Never having money on hand
- Overly worried about pleasing their partner
- Skipping out on work, school, or social outings for no clear reason
- Wearing clothes that don't fit the season, like long sleeves in summer to cover bruises

Are the Signs Different for Men?

They're often the same. And that's true whether the abusive partner is a woman or another man. It may be emotional or verbal, like taking away keys, medicines, or other essentials. Or things like constantly putting you down in public or on social media.

And, it can be physical. To make up for differences in strength, abusive partners may try to attack you in your sleep, by surprise, or with weapons and other objects. They may also abuse your children or pets.

Are the Signs Different for the LGBTQ Community?

Again, there's a lot in common, but the abuse may also target sexual orientation or gender identity. Your abuser may:

- Make excuses for abuse, like it's just how men are or that you wanted it to happen
- Tell you that police or others won't help because of your gender or orientation
- Tell you that you're not really how you identify
- Threaten to out you to family, friends, and others

What to Do if You're Being Abused

First, know that you deserve better and that this isn't your fault. If you're in an emergency, call 911.

It can be hard to decide whether to stay or leave. That's why it may help to start with a call to the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (1-800-799-7233). Call from a friend's house or somewhere else where you feel safe.

You can also turn to friends, family, neighbors, your doctor, or your spiritual community.

Also make sure you have an emergency escape plan:

- Hide a set of car keys.
- Pack a bag with keys, extra clothes, important papers, money, and medicines. You might keep it at a friend's house.
- Have a plan for calling the police in an emergency. You might have a code word so your kids, family, friends, or co-workers know you're in danger.
- Know where you'll go and how you'll get there.

What to Do if You Think Someone Is Being Abused

Say something. You might have your doubts. But if you're thinking about it, there's usually a reason. Someone's life could be in danger.

When you talk to the person, you can:

- Ask if anything is wrong
- Talk specifically about what concerns you
- Listen carefully
- Let the person know you're always there to talk and that your conversations are always private
- Offer to help
- Support the person's choices

