

# Warning Signs of Domestic Violence?

## Is Someone You Know Being Abused?

There is no way to tell for sure if someone is experiencing domestic violence. Those who are battered, and those who abuse, come in all genders, shapes, sizes, colors, economic classes, sexual orientations and personality types. Victims are not always passive with low self-esteem, and batterers do not always exhibit frequent violent or hateful behavior to their partners, especially in front of others. Most people experiencing relationship violence do not tell others what goes on at home. So how do you tell? Look for the signs:

### Injuries and Excuses:

In some cases, bruises and injuries may occur frequently and be in obvious places. When this happens, the abuser may be purposefully intending to keep the victim isolated and trapped at home. When black eyes and other bruising is a result of domestic violence, the victim may be forced to call in sick to work, miss school, or cancel social obligations or appointments in order to avoid the embarrassment and making excuses of how the injuries occurred. When there are frequent injuries seen by others, the victim may talk about being clumsy, or have elaborate stories of how the injuries occurred. In other cases, bruises and other outward injuries may be inflicted in places where the injuries won't show. This too is a tactic used by an abuser to keep a victim from reaching out or from having the violence exposed.

### Absences from Work or School:

When violence occurs, the victim may take time off from their normal schedule. If you see this happening, or the person is frequently late, this could be a sign of something (such as relationship violence) occurring. Not only may visible injury or bruising keep the victim at home as noted above, but the victim may need to take advantage of times when the abuser is away, such as at work, to care for themselves, sleep, or to recuperate from the incident or contemplate the situation and possible courses of action.

### Extremes of Self-Esteem:

Some victims have low self-esteem, while others have a great deal of confidence and esteem in other areas of their life (at work, as a parent, with hobbies, etc.) but not within their relationship. In terms of dealing with the relationship, a sense of powerlessness may exist. A victim may believe that they could not make it on their own or that they are somehow better off with the abuser as part of their life.

On the OTHER side of the coin, many victims see themselves in a much more positive light, even to the extent that profess to be able to CHANGE an abuser, if they could just figure out what they, the victim, needs to "fix" in the abuser to get the behaviors to change. In the first case, victims stay because they agree that they are worthy of the treatment the abuser dishes out, while in the second, denial of the seriousness of the violence, coupled with overconfidence in the ability to alter another person keeps victims and abusers together. Both are dangerous.

### Personality Changes:

People may notice that a very outgoing person, for instance, becoming quiet and shy around their partner over time. This happens because the one being battered "walks on egg shells" when in the presence of the one who is abusive. Abusers are often hyper-sensitive (or paranoid!) when "their" partner interacts with others. Accusations of flirting or affairs are common, as are parental-type scoldings for things like talking too loudly, or telling the wrong story to someone (because these might impact how people see the abuser, they don't want victims to make them look "bad" by what the abuser deems inappropriate behavior). Dealing with this aspect of abuse, especially over

time, teaches the victim that it is far easier to act a certain way when around other people with the abuser, than to go through the accusations and admonishments (which can escalate to physical violence).

## **Fear of Conflict:**

As a result of being battered, some victims may generalize the experience of powerlessness with other relationships. Conflicts with co-workers, friends, relatives, and neighbors can create a lot of anxiety. For many, it is easier to give in to whatever someone else wants than to challenge it. Asserting needs and desires begins to feel like a battle, and not worth the risks of losing. These victims tend to get victimized over and over, not only by the abuser, but by bosses, co-workers, family members, indeed almost everyone around them, who knowingly or not, learns that the victim will give them what they demand.

Victims may also exhibit overly-friendly behavior, particularly to those that they perceive as being in a position of power ... like the abuser's in-laws, a boss or supervisor at work (gets to be seen as being a "suck up"), or even to advocates if a victim is seeking help from a domestic violence program. Any police officer who has been on the job for a while can relate stories of responding to domestic violence calls, and arriving to find an injured victim, whose first words are to ask the officers if they'd like a cold beverage.

## **Passive-Aggressive Behavior:**

For adults or children who have experienced violence from a loved one, the ability to identify feelings and wants, and to express them, may not exist. This could result in passive-aggressive behavior. Rather than telling others what they want, they say one thing but then express anger or frustration in an aggressive manner (such as burning dinner, or not completing a report on time for their boss).

## **Self-blame:**

You may notice someone taking all of the blame for things that go wrong. A co-worker may share a story about something that happened at home and then take all of the blame for whatever occurred. If you notice this happening a lot, it may be a sign that this person is being experiencing emotional abuse. Keep in mind that in an emotionally abusive relationship, abusers often excel at constantly "reminding" the victim that THEY are to blame for whatever has been happening. Once internalized, this can poison one's ability to see through an abuser's lies.

## **Isolation and Control:**

In general, adults who are abused physically are often isolated. Their partners tend to control their lives to a great extent as well as verbally degrade them. This isolation is intended to make the abuser the center of the victim's universe, as well as to purposefully limit the victim's access to others who might attempt to help the victim escape. You might notice that someone: has limited access to the telephone, frequently makes excuses as to why they can't see you or they insist that their partner has to come along, doesn't seem to be able to make decisions about spending money, isn't allowed to drive, go to school or get a job; or has a notable change in self-esteem which might include inability to make eye contact or looking away or at the ground when talking.

## **Stress-Related Problems:**

These often manifest as poor sleep, sleeping at strange times (also a sign of depression), experiencing non-specific aches or pains that are either constant and/or recurring, stomach problems, chronic headaches, and flare up of problems made worse by stress such as eczema.

**A.A.R.D.V.A.R.C.**

**An Abuse, Rape, and Domestic Violence Aid and Resource Collection** 3/3/11