

Signs of an Abusive Personality

DEAR ABBY

ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

Dear Readers: Yesterday I published a letter from the grandparents of a 19-year-old woman who was murdered by a young man she had been living with for four months. Her grieving family asked if I would reprint the column that outlined the traits of a potential batterer. In her memory, here it is. It was adapted from "Signs to Look for in a Battering Personality," with permission from the Project for Victims of Family Violence, Fayetteville, Ark.

15 REASONS TO LEAVE YOUR LOVER: WARNING SIGNS OF AN ABUSIVE PERSONALITY

Something's just not right in your relationship, and you can't put your finger on it. So here's some help. If your mate is displaying a combination of these behaviors, then you may have a potential batterer on your hands.

1. A push for quick involvement: Comes on very strong, claiming, "I've never felt loved like this by anyone." An abuser pressures the woman for an exclusive commitment almost immediately.

2. Jealousy: Excessively possessive; calls constantly or visits unexpectedly; prevents you from going to work because "you might meet someone"; checks the mileage on your car.

3. Controlling: Interrogates you intensely (especially if you're late) about whom you talked to and where you were; keeps all the money; insists you ask permission to go anywhere or do anything.

4. Unrealistic expectations: Expects you to be the perfect woman and meet his every need.

5. Isolation: Tries to cut you off from family and friends; accuses people who are your supporters of "causing trouble"; may deprive you of a phone or car or try to prevent you from holding a job.

6. Blames others for problems and mistakes: The boss, you—it's always someone else's fault if anything goes wrong.

7. Makes everyone else responsible for his feelings: The abuser says, "You make me angry" instead of, "I am angry," or, "You're hurting me by not doing what I tell you." Less obvious is the claim: "You make me happy."

8. Hypersensitivity: Is easily insulted, claiming that his feelings are hurt when he is really mad. He'll rant about the injustice of things that are just part of life.

9. Cruelty to animals and to children: Kills or punishes animals brutally. Also may expect children to do things that are far beyond their ability (whips a 2-year-old for wetting a diaper) or may tease them until they cry. Sixty-five percent of abusers who beat their partner will also abuse children.

10. "Playful" use of force during sex: Enjoys throwing you down or holding you down against your will during sex; says he finds the idea of rape exciting.

11. Verbal abuse: Constantly criticizes you, or says blatantly cruel, hurtful things; degrades, curses, calls you ugly names. This may also involve sleep deprivation, waking you up with relentless verbal abuse.

12. Rigid sex roles: Expects you to serve, obey and remain at home.

13. Sudden mood swings: Switches from sweetly loving to explosively violent in a matter of minutes.

14. Past battering: Admits hitting women, but says they made him do it or the situation brought it on.

15. Threats of violence: Makes such statements as, "I'll break your neck" or "I'll kill you," and then dismisses them with, "Everybody talks that way" or "I didn't really mean it." If he has come this far, it is time to get help or get out.