

SIGNS TO LOOK FOR IN A BATTERING PERSONALITY

(Project for Victims of Family Violence, Fayetteville, AR)

Many women are interested in ways to predict whether they are about to become involved with someone who will be physically abusive. Below is a list of behaviors that are seen in people who beat their girlfriends or wives. The last four signs listed are almost always seen only if the person is a batterer. If the person has several of the other behaviors, say three or more, there is a strong potential for physical violence. The more signs the person has, the more likely the person is a batterer. In some cases, a batterer may have only a couple of behaviors that the woman can recognize, but they are very exaggerated (e.g., extreme jealousy over ridiculous things). Initially the batterer will try to explain his behavior as signs of his love and concern, and a woman may be flattered at first; as time goes on, the behaviors become more severe and serve to dominate the woman.

Quick Involvement - Many battered women dated or knew their abuser for less than six months before they were engaged or living together. He may have come on like a whirl-wind, and said things like "you're the only person I could ever talk to", or "I've never felt loved like this by anyone before". He needs someone desperately, and will pressure the woman to commit to him.

Jealousy - At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will always say that his jealousy is a sign of love. Jealousy has nothing to do with love; it's a sign of insecurity and possessiveness. He will question the woman about who she talks to, accuse her of flirting, or be jealous of time she spends with family, friends or children. As the jealousy progresses, he may call her frequently during the day or drop by unexpectedly. He may refuse to let her work for fear she'll meet someone else, or even do strange behaviors such as checking her car mileage or asking friends to watch her.

Controlling Behavior - At first, the batterer will say that his behavior is because he's concerned for the woman's safety, her need to use her time well, or her need to make good decisions. He will be angry if the woman is "late" coming back from the store or an appointment, he will question her closely about where she went, and who she talked to. As this behavior gets worse, he may not let the woman make personal decisions about the house, her clothing, going to church; he may keep all the money or even make her ask permission to leave the house or room.

Unrealistic Expectations - He is very dependent on the woman for all of his needs. He expects her to be the perfect wife, mother, lover, friend, He might 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 him emotionally and in the home.

Isolation - The man may try to cut the woman off from all resources. If she has male friends, she is a "whore", if she has female friends, she is a lesbian, if she is close to her family, she is "tied to the apron strings". He may accuse people who are supportive to her of "causing trouble", he may want to live in the country without a

phone, he may not let her use the car, or he may try to keep her from working or going to school.

Blames Others for His Problems - If he is chronically unemployed, someone is always doing him wrong, out to get him. He may make mistakes and then blame the woman for upsetting him and keeping him from concentrating on doing his job. He will tell the woman she is at fault for almost anything that goes wrong.

Hypersensitivity - The man is easily insulted, he claims his feelings are 'hurt' when he's really very mad, or he takes the slightest set backs as personal attacks. He will "rant and rave" about the injustice of things that have happened to him, things that are really just part of living, such as: being asked to work overtime, getting a traffic ticket, being told that something he does is annoying, being asked to help with chores.

Cruelty to Animals or Children - This is a man who punishes animals brutally or is insensitive to their pain or suffering. He may expect children to be capable of doing things far beyond their ability (whips a two year old child for wetting their diaper), or he may tease children or young brothers and sisters until they cry. Sixty-percent of men who beat the women they are with, also beat their children. He may not want children to eat at the table or expect them to keep to their room all evening while he is home.

"Playful" Use of Force in Sex - This man may like to throw the woman down and hold her down during sex. He may want to act out fantasies during sex where the woman is helpless. He's letting her know that the idea of "rape" excites him. He may show little concern about whether the woman wants to have sex and use sulking or anger to manipulate her into compliance. He may start having sex with the woman while she is sleeping, or demand sex when she is ill or tired.

Verbal Abuse - In addition to saying things that are meant to be cruel and hurtful, this can be seen by the man as degrading the woman, cursing her, running down any of her accomplishments. The man will tell her that she is stupid and unable to function without him. This may involve waking her up to verbally abuse her or not letting her sleep.

Rigid Sex Roles - The man expects a woman to serve him. He will demand that she stay at home, that she must obey him in all things - even things that are criminal in nature. The abuser will see women as inferior to men, more stupid, unable to be a whole person without a relationship.

Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde - Many women are confused by their abuser's "sudden" changes in mood. They will describe him as being nice one minute and the next minute he explodes. Explosiveness and mood swings are typical of men who beat their partners, and these behaviors are related to other characteristics such as hypersensitivity.

Past Battering - The man may say he has hit women in the past, but they made him do it. The woman may hear from the relatives or ex-spouse that the man is abusive. A batterer will beat any women he is with. Situational circumstances do not make an abusive personality.

Threats of Violence - This would include any threat of physical force meant to control the woman. "I'll slap your mouth off", "I'll kill you", "I'll break your neck". Most men do not threaten their mates, but a batterer will try to excuse this behavior by saying "everybody talks like that".

Breaking or Striking Objects - This behavior is used as a punishment (breaking loved possessions), but is mostly used to terrorize the woman into submission. The man may beat on tables with his fist, throw objects around and/or throw objects around or near the woman. Again, this is a remarkable behavior; only very immature people beat on objects in the presence of other people in order to threaten them.

Any Force During an Argument - This may involve a man holding a woman down, physically restraining her from leaving the room, any pushing or shoving. The man may hold the woman against a wall and say, "you are going to listen to me!"