



## SIGNS OF A BATTERING PERSONALITY

Many people are interested in ways that they can 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 partners. 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 partner can recognize, but they are very exaggerated (e.g., extreme jealousy over ridiculous things).

Initially the batterer will try to explain his/her behavior as signs of his love and concern, and his/her partner may be flattered at first. As time goes on, the behaviors become more severe and serve to dominate the partner. (A batterer and his or her partner may be male or female, but for simplicity's sake and since most victims are women, we will refer to the victim as a woman.)

1. **Jealousy:** At the beginning of a relationship, an abuser will almost always say that his/her jealousy is a sign of love. Jealousy has nothing to do with love. It is a sign of insecurity and possessiveness. The abuser will question the victim about whom she talks to, accuse her of flirting, or be jealous of the time she spends with family, friends and children. As the jealousy progresses, he/she may call her frequently during the day or drop by unexpectedly. The abuser 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.
2. **Controlling Behavior:** At first, the batterer may say that this behavior is because he/she's concerned for the victim's safety, her need to use her time well, or her need to make good decisions. He/she may be angry if the victim is "late" coming back from the store or an appointment. The abuser may question her closely about where she went, whom she talked to. As this behavior gets worse, he/she may not let the victim make personal decisions about the house, her clothing, going to church. He/she may keep all the money or even make her ask permission to leave the house or room.
3. **Quick involvement:** Many victims dated or knew their abuser for less than six months before they were engaged or living together. The abuser comes on like a whirlwind—

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“You’re the only person I could ever talk to,” “I’ve never felt loved like this by anyone.” He/she needs someone desperately and will pressure the victim to commit to him/her.

4. **Unrealistic Expectations:** The abuser is very dependent on the victim for all of his/her needs. He/she expects her to be the perfect wife/girlfriend, mother, lover, and friend. He/she may say things like, “If you love me, I’m all you need—you’re all I need.” The victim is supposed to take care of everything for the abuser emotionally and in the home.
5. **Isolation:** The abuser tries to cut the woman off from all resources. If she has men friends, she is a “whore”; if she has woman friends, she is a “lesbian”; if she is close to family, she is “tied to the apron strings”. He/she accuses people who are her supports of “causing trouble.” He/she may want to live in the country without a phone. He/she may not let her use the car. Or he/she may try to keep her from working or going to school.
6. **Blame Others for His/Her Problems:** If the abuser is chronically unemployed, someone is always doing him/her wrong—out to get him/her. He/she may make mistakes and then blame the victim for upsetting him/her and keeping him/her from concentrating on doing his/her job. He/she may tell the victim she is at fault for almost anything that goes wrong.
7. **Blames Others for His/Her Feelings:** He/she may tell the victim, “you make me mad,” “you’re hurting me by not doing what I ask,” “I can’t help being angry.” The abuser really makes the decision about what he/she thinks and feels but will use feelings to manipulate the victim. Harder to catch are his/her claims that “you make me happy”—“you control how I feel.”
8. **Hypersensitivity:** He /she may be easily insulted. He/she claims his/her feelings are “hurt” when he/she’s really very mad, or he/she takes the slightest set backs as personal attacks. He/she will “rant and rave” about the injustice of things that have happened to her/him—things that are really just part of living like being asked to work over-time, getting a traffic ticket, being told that something he/she does is annoying, having to do household tasks.
9. **Cruelty to Animals or Children:** This may be a man/woman who punishes animals brutally or is insensitive to their pain or suffering. He/she may expect children to be capable of doing things far beyond their ability (hits a 2-year-old for wetting their diaper) or he/she may tease children or young brothers and sisters until they cry. (Approximately 60% of men who beat their partners also beat their children). He/she may not want children to eat at the table or expect them to keep to their room all evening while he/she is at home.
10. **“Playful” Use of Force in Sex:** He/she may like to throw the victim down and hold her down during sex. He/she may want to act out fantasies during sex where the victim is helpless. He/she may be letting her know that the idea of “rape” excites him. He/she may show little concern about whether the victim wants to have sex and use sulking or anger to manipulate her into compliance. He/she may start having sex with the victim while she is sleeping or demand sex when she is ill or tired. He/she may force the victim to have sex (a crime—marital rape has been a crime in California since 1970).

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11. **Verbal Abuse:** In addition to saying things that are meant to be cruel and hurtful, this can be seen by the abuser degrading the victim, cursing her, and belittling any of her accomplishments, the abuser may tell her that she's stupid and unable to function without him/her. This may involve waking her up to verbally abuse her or not letting her sleep.
12. **Rigid Sex Roles:** The abuser expects a woman to serve him/her, may say that she must stay at home, that she must obey him/her in all things—even things criminal in nature. The abuser will see women as inferior to men, more stupid, unable to be a whole person without a relationship. Same-sex relationships often do not have defined "male/female" sex roles. However, some same-sex relationships may have defined roles in which these dynamics will play out. On the other hand, the partner who may be viewed as more "feminine" may be the abuser. It should not be assumed that the partner who appears more "masculine" is the abuser.
13. **Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde:** Many victims are confused by their abuser's "sudden" changes in mood—they will describe that one minute he/she's nice and the next minute he/she explodes. The victim may describe the abuser as having some special "mental problems" or that he/she's "crazy". Explosiveness and mood swings are typical of men/women who beat their partners, and these behaviors are related to other characteristics such as hypersensitivity.
14. **Past Battering:** The abuser may say that he/she has hit women in the past, but they made him/her do it. The victim may hear from the relatives, ex-spouses, ex-girlfriends that the man/woman is abusive. A batterer may beat any woman he/she is with.
15. **Threats of Violence:** This would include any threat of physical force meant to control the victim. "I'll slap your mouth off," "I'll kill you," "I'll break your neck." Most men/women do not threaten their partners, but a batterer will try to excuse this behavior by saying, "everybody talks like that," or minimize it by saying that they didn't mean it.
16. **Breaking or Striking Objects:** This behavior is used as a punishment (breaking loved possessions), but is mostly used to terrorize the victim into submission. The abuser may beat on tables or walls with his/her fist, throw objects around or near the victim. Again, this is very remarkable behavior. Only very immature people beat on objects in the presence of other people in order to threaten them.
17. **Any Force During an Argument:** This may involve a man/woman holding the victim down, physically restraining her from leaving the room, any pushing or shoving. The abuser may hold the woman against a wall and say "you're going to listen to me".

Adapted from *Project for Victims of Family Violence, Inc.*, Fayetteville, AR.

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