



Warning Signs of Domestic Violence

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 personality types. Battered women are not always passive with low self-esteem, and batterers are not always violent or hateful to their partner in front of others. Most people experiencing relationship violence do not tell others what goes on at home. So how do you tell?

If you're afraid for your immediate safety, call 911. For help and advice on escaping an abusive relationship, call:

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
1-800-787-3224 (TTY)

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline

1-866-331-9474
1-866-331-8453 (TTY)

In New York City ONLY

Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-621-HOPE (4673)
Crime Victims Hotline: 1-866-689-HELP (4357)
Rape & Sexual Assault Hotline: 1-212-227-3000
TDD phone number for all hotlines: 1-866-604-5350

Here are some signs to look for:

Injuries and Excuses:

In some cases, bruises and injuries may occur frequently and be in obvious places. When this happens, the intent of the batterer is to keep the victim isolated and trapped at home. When black eyes and other bruising is a result of an assault, the person being battered may be forced to call in sick to work, or face the embarrassment and excuses of how the injuries occurred. In other cases, bruises and other outward injuries never occur. When there are frequent injuries seen by others, the one being battered may talk about being clumsy, or have elaborate stories of how the injuries occurred. The truth about the source of injuries will not usually be told unless the one told could be trusted and/or the one being battered wants help to end the relationship.

Absences from Work or School:

When severe beatings or other trauma related to violence occurs, the one being battered may take time off from his/her 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.

Low Self-Esteem:

Some battered women have low self-esteem, while others have a great deal of confidence and esteem in other areas of their life (at work, as a mother, with hobbies, etc.) but not within their relationship. In terms of dealing with the relationship, a sense of powerlessness and low self-esteem may exist. A battered woman may believe that she could not make it on her own without her partner and that she is lucky to have him in her life.

Accusations of Having Affairs:

This is a common tactic used by batterers as an attempt to isolate their partners and as an excuse for a beating. It could include accusations of looking at other men, wanting to be with other men, or having affairs with the man bagging groceries at the local supermarket. Friends of the couple may observe this at times, but what is seen in public is usually only a small fraction of what the battered woman experiences at home.

Personality Changes:

People may notice that a very outgoing person, for instance, becomes quiet and shy around his/her partner. This happens because the one being battered "walks on egg shells" when in the presence of the one who is abusive to her. Accusations (of flirting, talking too loudly, or telling the wrong story to someone) have taught the abused person that it is easier to act a certain way around the batterer than to experience additional accusations in the future.

Fear of Conflict:

As a result of being battered, some 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 one's needs and desires begins to feel like a battle, and not worth the risks of losing.

Not Knowing What One Wants or How One Feels:

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 you want, you say one thing but then express your anger or frustration in an aggressive manner (such as scratching his favorite car, burning dinner, or not completing a report on time for your boss).

Blaming Others for Everything:

The abuse, which usually includes the batterer blaming others for everything that goes wrong, is usually targeted at a partner or ex-partner. For example, a simple drive somewhere could turn into a violent situation if the batterer blames the partner and/or children for getting them lost. Co-workers and relatives may observe this type of behavior, and it may be directed at others as well.

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 one is taking all of the blame is being battered.

Aggressive or Care-taking Behavior in Children:

Children who live in violent homes may take that experience with them to school and to the playground. Often the class bully is a child who sees violence in his home (directed at mom, or at some or all of the children in the home). Children who seem very grown-up and are sensitive and attentive to others' needs may see violence at home as well.

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.