Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Behaviour

The following is a list of behaviors that may indicate a potential domestic abuser. It is not the purpose of the listing to imply that every person with some of these attributes is a perpetrator although where these occur it is worth considering whether you, a loved one or a client may be at risk of or experiencing domestic abuse.

Jealousy

At the start of the relationship, an abuser will equate jealously with love. The abuser will question the victim about who the victim talks to, accuse the victim of flirting, or become jealous of time spent with others. The abuser may call the victim frequently during the day, drop by unexpectedly, refuse to let the victim work, check the car mileage, or ask friends to watch the victim.

Controlling behavior

In the beginning an abuser will attribute controlling behavior to concern for the victim (for example, the victim’s safety or decision-making skills). As this behavior progresses the situation will worsen, and the abuser may assume all control of finances or prevent the victim from coming and going freely.

Quick involvement

A victim often has known or dated the abuser for a brief period of time before getting engaged or living together. The abuser will pressure the victim to commit to the relationship. A victim may be made to feel guilty for wanting to slow the pace or end the relationship.

Unrealistic expectations

An abuser expects the victim to meet all of the abuser’s needs, to take care of everything emotionally and domestically.

Isolation

An abuser will attempt to isolate the victim by severing the victim’s ties to outside support and resources. They will accuse the victim’s friends and family of being "trouble makers." The abuser may block the victim’s access to use of a vehicle, work, or telephone service in the home.

Blames others for problems

An abuser will blame others for all problems or for the abuser’s own shortcomings. Someone is always out to get the abuser or is an obstacle to the abuser’s achievements. The victim or potential victim will be blamed for almost anything.

Blames others for feelings

An abuser will use feelings to manipulate the victim. Common phrases to look for: “You're hurting me by not doing what I want.” “You control how I feel.”

Hypersensitivity

An abusive person is easily insulted, perceiving the slightest setbacks as personal attacks.
Cruelty to animals or children

This is a person who punishes animals brutally or is insensitive to their pain. The abuser may expect children to perform beyond their capability (for example hitting a two-year-old for wetting a diaper or teasing children or siblings until they cry).

"Playful" use of force in sex

This behavior includes restraining partners against their will during sex, acting out fantasies in which the partner is helpless, initiating sex when the partner is asleep, or demanding sex when the partner is ill or tired. The abuser may show little concern for his partner's wishes and will use sulking and anger to manipulate compliance.

Verbal abuse

This behavior involves saying things that are intended to be cruel and hurtful, cursing or degrading the victim, or putting down the victim's accomplishments.

Rigid sex roles

The victim, almost always a woman, will be expected to serve. For instance, a male abuser will see women as inferior to men, responsible for menial tasks, stupid, and unable to be a whole person without a relationship.

Dual personality "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"

Explosive behavior and moodiness, which can shift quickly to congeniality, are typical of people who beat their partners.

Past violence

If they have been violent to their partner before it is likely that they will be violent to new partners if the individual is involved with the abuser long enough for the cycle of abuse to begin.

Threats of violence

This consists of any threat of physical force meant to control the partner.

Breaking or striking objects

This behavior is used as punishment (breaking sentimental possessions) or to terrorize the victim into submission.

Any force during an argument

This may involve an abuser holding down his the victim, physically restraining the victim from leaving, or pushing or shoving. Holding someone back in order to make demands, such as "You will listen to me!" is also a show of force.