



I think I may be abusive ... what can I do?

Recognize that you are abusive.

Try answering the following questions:

- Can I express anger without becoming physically or verbally abusive?
- Can my partner express anger without my becoming physically or verbally abusive?
- Can my partner go out, get a job, or go to school without asking for my permission?
- Is my partner afraid of me?
- Do I put my partner down or name call?
- Do I blame my partner (or others) whenever things go wrong?
- Do I control, or attempt to control, the time my partner spends, or wishes to spend, with family, friends or co-workers?
- Do I forbid my partner from using money to buy personal things?
- Do I force, or attempt to force, my partner to have unwanted sex?
- Do I ever destroy or damage things that are important to my partner when I am angry or don't get my way?

If you have answered NO to either of the first three questions, and YES to any of the rest, then there is a strong chance that you are abusive towards your partner.

Take Responsibility

If you have realized that some of your actions and attitudes toward your partner may be abusive, you have already made a very important step toward change and being able to enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship. It is difficult and painful to realize that you may be hurting someone you love, but it is the first step toward change.

The only person who can make a difference is YOU! One of the main problems with repeat abusers and perpetrators is denial of the abusive nature of their actions and attitudes, and denial of any 'real' effect on their victims.

Many abusive behaviors are learned early, and they may have been part of your coping mechanisms since childhood. They are difficult not only to recognize, but also to stop. You have to take responsibility for your actions. This means recognizing when you are saying something hurtful or doing something harmful to your partner and the excuses that allow you to deny you are really doing anything wrong.

It is a good idea to discuss the abuse, your feelings about it and attitudes towards your partner with a Batterers Intervention and Prevention Program (BIPP).

Where can I get help?

A **Batterers Intervention and Prevention Program (BIPP)** is a community program that makes victim safety its first priority, establishes accountability for batterers and promotes a coordinated community response to domestic violence. To find the nearest BIPP program, call the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233.

Things which are not recommended

If violence has been an issue in your relationship, **Couple's Counseling** is not recommended. **Mediation** is also not recommended if you are going through separation or divorce. The abuse has to be dealt with before any form of joint counseling or mediation can be effective.

In the past **Anger Management** courses have been recommended for abusers. However, recent research indicates that these courses are not effective in dealing with abusive behavior, since abuse is less about controlling anger, and more about issues of power and control issues. In short, anger management may be part of the problem, but is not the root cause of domestic abuse.

Will getting help 'save' my relationship?

It may, or it may not. Often by the time the perpetrator realizes he or she has a problem, too much has already happened and the trust cannot be rebuilt. If you are seeking help with the sole intention of keeping or regaining a partner who has decided to leave due to your abuse, then you are probably approaching it with the wrong motives, to get or keep what you want than to make a necessary change in yourself.

Intervention programs can only help if YOU want to change. You may have to accept that due to your behavior you have lost the person you love, but at the very least you can ensure that you do not cause more pain and hurt to the next person you get involved with.

Other issues to bear in mind

Alcohol or Drug Abuse. Frequently Domestic Violence is related to alcohol or drug abuse. It is easy to blame drinking for the abuse, telling yourself that when you are drunk, you just don't realize what you are doing. This in itself is another form of denial. If you know that you get violent when you drink, addressing your drug or alcohol problem may be a part of changing your behavior. It is still important to get help from a Batterer's Intervention and Prevention Program (BIPP).

Taking Time Out. One coping mechanism that many abusers have learned to use effectively is 'taking time out'. This basically involves recognizing when you are reaching the point at which you are likely to become abusive, and literally removing yourself. You may go for a walk or go into another room. The important thing is to remove yourself from the moment, take time out, and calm down again. Obviously, it's a good idea to tell your partner you intend 'taking time out' before arguments occur - or they may be left wondering what you are doing! It is **not** suggested that you use this coping tactic instead of attending a BIPP, but simply that many have found it helpful in avoiding abusive actions and making themselves more aware of what they are feeling and thinking.

To learn about services in your area, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or TTY 1-800-787-3224.