

ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

What are the signs of an abusive relationship?

KEY WORDS control | jealousy | isolation | gaslighting | pain 

When a relationship is healthy, the people in it experience respect, support, acceptance, good communication, trust and understanding, positive conflict resolution, comfortable physical expressions of love and separate identities. To learn more about the elements of a healthy relationship, check out the text “How do I know if my relationship is healthy?”

However, the **breakdown or absence of these factors** may signal that your relationship is **abusive**.

An abusive relationship makes you feel **discomfort, disrespect, fear, anger, sadness, or numbness**. Yet, abuse may not always be easy to spot, especially if we have been persuaded to believe that abusive behaviour is ‘normal’ or its seriousness is downplayed.

Whether it's physical, sexual, emotional, non-verbal, or even digital, it's not okay. Let's go over these types of abuses and their signs to help you feel better identify if you're with someone who uplifts or drags you down.

- **Physical abuse** involves any kind of force, like hitting or slapping, and even grabbing your partner in the heat of arguments.
- **Sexual abuse** is when someone pressures or forces you into any sexual activity without your clear and enthusiastic consent, such as insisting on sexting.
- **Emotional abuse** happens when someone puts you down or constantly criticizes you, controls you (such as isolating you from loved ones or deciding how you should dress or act), gaslights you (such as denying things they've said or done, making you feel confused and questioning your sanity) and negatively impacts your self-esteem.
- **Non-verbal abuse** can manifest through various actions, gestures, or behaviours, such as constant: eye-rolling, dismissive or disgusted facial expressions, intimidating stares, as well as invasion of personal space, ignoring your partner or giving them silent treatment, and withholding affection or approval as a form of control.
- And then there's **digital abuse**, which happens when technology is used to control, manipulate, or harass you, such as someone demanding access to your social media or sharing your private pictures with others.



All of these abusive behaviours come with **warning signs**. Think of them as the smoke before the fire. These include: extreme jealousy, humiliation, invasion of privacy, false accusations, excessive gift-giving, anger outbursts, damaging your belongings, unexpected visits, and monitoring you through social media.

We know it can be tricky to navigate this issue, especially when emotions are involved. But guess what? You're not alone, and **loving someone doesn't mean we can or should tolerate abuse**. There are people who care about you and want to help. If you ever find yourself questioning whether your relationship is abusive, talking to a friend, a family member, or a trusted adult can help you see the situation more clearly. There are also a number of **expert services** you can access by phone or online to help you navigate an abusive relationship.

If you're on the other side of this issue and suspect that someone in your life is experiencing abuse and you'd like to help, check out our infographic here.

Trust your instincts, and **if something doesn't feel right, it probably isn't**. You deserve a relationship that bring you joy, growth, and for which you can say: this person brings out the best version of me.

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