

Early Warning Signs: Relationship Violence

Relationship violence is when one person gains and maintains power and control over their intimate partner. Abuse can start out slowly and be subtle, and abuse is not always physical. There are often **early warning signs** that occur before increasingly controlling tactics or physical violence are utilized.

People who are abusive may:

- **Act Jealous**, which may be flattering at first, but may also feel smothering and isolating. The abusive partner often makes accusations that the other partner is flirting, cheating, or betraying them.
- **Be too good to be true**, presenting a charming and attentive focus that can change with time. Often the good times in the beginning make it difficult for the other partner to make the decision to leave, after the relationship is no longer safe.
- **Blame behavior on external factors** such as drinking, drugs, stress, growing up with abuse, problems at work, being unemployed, things the other partner may have said or done, or because an ex-partner allegedly treated them badly.
- **Isolate their partner** by discouraging them from spending time with family, friends, or others, or punishing them if they do so. The other partner may feel lonely and blame themselves, as they lose support and validation from others when warning signs of abuse occur.
- **Engage in name calling and criticism** that can affect the other partner's self-esteem and mental health. Abusive partners may use sarcasm, a condescending tone, blame their partner, or claim that they are "only joking."
- **Move quickly in the relationship**, by convincing the other partner to move in together, get married, get a pet and/or have children together. They may create financial and emotional dependencies by convincing the other partner to move away from their community, leave school or a job, or give up their car.

*If you would like to talk about your relationship, or are concerned about someone you care about, contact **MSU Safe Place**, the relationship violence and stalking program at Michigan State University, for free, confidential, non-judgmental support.*

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