

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

Am I abusive?

If you are not quite sure whether your actions could be considered abusive or not, read through the [Warning Signs of an Abusive Personality](#) and search your heart. Are any of those actions or attitudes ones you tend towards? You may also find it helpful to read the article by John Stibbs on healthy and unhealthy relationships: [Emotional Boundaries](#). Does your relationship tend more towards a healthy or an unhealthy one?

Maybe you could ask yourself some of the following questions:

- Would you treat your boss, mate or next-door-neighbor the same way as you do your partner?
- If someone else were treating your daughter, son, brother, sister or friend the same way as you treat your partner, would you consider it okay or not?
- Has your partner told you that your behavior is unreasonable or abusive?
- Has your partner either left you or threatened to leave you if you don't stop being nasty to her/him?
- Have previous relationships gone to the wall due to your behavior?

If you have answered NO to either of the first questions, and YES to any of the last three, then the chances are pretty high that you are abusive towards your partner.

On taking Responsibility

First of all, if you have realized that some of your actions and attitudes towards your partner may be abusive, you have already made a very important step toward change and being able to enjoy a mutually beneficial relationship. Well done! It is difficult and painful to realize that you may be hurting someone you love, but it is the first step towards 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. Acknowledging to ourselves that we have a problem, or that we are hurting someone we love is very, very difficult and painful, and many people can never quite admit it to themselves.

A lot of abusive behaviors are ingrained, they may have been part of your personality and coping mechanism since childhood, and they are difficult not just to recognize, but also to crack. Nobody else can do that for you, you have to take responsibility for your actions yourself - fully. This means recognizing when you are saying something hurtful or doing something harmful to your partner; learning to recognize your reactions within yourself, how you feel when you get wound up, how you feel after an abusive episode; the thoughts and excuses you make to yourself to allow you to deny you are really doing anything wrong. Ask yourself some of these questions:

- Do you regularly vent your frustration on your partner?
- Do you tell yourself that your partner is overreacting to 'being told off'?
- Do you tell your partner they are 'making a fuss about nothing' or 'making a mountain out of molehill'?
- Do you tell yourself what you do is not that bad and that so-and-so would be far worse?
- Do you think that if your partner just didn't 'wind you up on purpose' then the abuse would not happen?
- Do you tell yourself that your partner deserved the abuse, because they are not perfect either?

- Do you tell yourself that because you only get nasty when you are drunk it isn't really the same as if you were really abusive?

If you answered YES to any of the above, you may still not be taking full responsibility for your actions. It may be a good idea to discuss the abuse, your feelings about it and attitudes towards your partner with a third person, preferably someone not involved with either of you, such as a counselor or helpline volunteer.

Where can I get help? There are several Perpetrator Programs available and many of these accept self-referrals. To my knowledge, there are none at present that cater for female perpetrators of Domestic Abuse, but there are several counselors and other professionals who are qualified to do so. RESPECT can provide you with a full list of either programs or professionals in your area.

To find out what these Perpetrator Programs entail, please check out [CHANGE Perpetrator Programs](#) , and the BBC website Hitting Home also has some details and some personal stories and impressions from men and women who have been involved in such programs. The Freedom Program© also runs courses for men across the UK which look at the underlying beliefs and attitudes which create an environment in which domestic abuse can occur together with the tactics employed to control or abuse. The courses usually run over a 2-day period and accept self-referrals. Please see the link below for more details.

If you are facing prosecution for violence towards your partner, the Court has got the option of referring you to such programs, and there are further programs organized and run by the Probation service - though these do not usually take self-referrals. Attendance at one of these will often be included if you are on probation.

Several of our contacts have tried accessing help via their local GP or NHS service. Generally these have proven inadequate to their needs, and there is the usual problem of waiting lists. However, it is always worth checking with either your local GP or Health Center whether there are any local charities or organizations they can recommend or even refer you to. In a similar fashion, your local Social Services should have details of any perpetrator programs or related services in your area, and are also able to refer.

Things which are not recommended

If violence has been, and especially if it currently still is an issue in your relationship, then **Couples Counseling** is not recommended nor is **Mediation**. Basically the abuse itself 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, especially men who have been violent towards their female partners. However, more and more research seems to be indicating that such courses are not effective in dealing with abusive behavior as such, as abuse is less about being able to control anger, **and more about basic attitudes and control issues**. In short, anger management may be part of the problem, but is usually not either the main problem or 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. Sadly a lot of men will refer themselves to perpetrator programs in a bid to stop their partner from leaving or even in a bid to persuade her to come back and give it another try. 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 - more as a tool to get or keep what you want than as a necessary change in yourself.

Perpetrator programs or counseling can really 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 try to ensure that you do not cause more pain and hurt to the next person you get involved in.

Resource: http://www.hiddenhurt.co.uk/Abuser/abusive_help.htm

Personal Plan

I have the following tendencies towards domestic violence.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

I will stop the following behaviors:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

I will use the following resources to help me.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Who can I turn to for help when things aren't going well?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.