

NOT BLAMING WOMEN FOR WOMAN ABUSE

Abused women regularly ask themselves, "How can I avoid an abuser?" When an abused woman finds herself in more than one relationship with an abuser, family and friends may also ask her "why do you keep choosing abusers?" In asking these questions, we are placing the responsibility for the abuse on the woman and blaming her for it. It is believed that through some fault of her own she has "picked" or sought out someone who would hurt her. Society reinforces that an abused woman should have known better, should have seen the signs, or should have left when she first noticed the abuse. Instead, the responsibility for the abuse needs to rest on the abuser. It is the abuser's actions that are wrong. Women do not "choose abusers".

In attempts to avoid getting into a relationship with an abuser, women often ask for a checklist that would help to identify an abuser. While there are commonalities among abusers, a checklist cannot guarantee a woman's safety. Many women state that the abusive behaviour did not begin until they were committed to the relationship in some way; for instance, until, there was an emotional or financial attachment, co-habitation, marriage or pregnancy. Safety for women will only be guaranteed when abusers take responsibility for their controlling actions and change them.

Some of these indicators on their own may not be signs of abuse.

Characteristics of some abusers are:

Abusers come from all social, economic, religious and cultural backgrounds.

Some, but not all, abusers have witnessed woman abuse in their home.

Abusers may lose their tempers more often or more easily. They may also show their aggression by throwing or punching things, destroying objects, or harming others including pets. They may use violent language, put downs or threats.

Some abusers try to interfere in a woman's relationship with others or her plans to spend time with others. This may involve abusers suggesting alternative plans, putting down her friends, or giving the woman a hard time when she returns.

Abusers continually want to know about the woman's activities and whereabouts; such as, who she is with, and what she will be doing. Abusers may also expect a woman to spend her free time with them, call her repeatedly, question her if they are late, or appear unexpectedly at places she may frequent. Abusers may discount their behaviour by saying it is because they love the woman or are afraid to lose her.

Abusers may try to engage the woman in a commitment to the relationship quickly and before she is ready. This may involve moving in together, getting married, leaving her job or becoming pregnant.

Abusers are often unwilling to compromise and negotiate with their partners. Abusers strive to gain and maintain control over others, and believe they have the right to control women in particular. They seek to impose their opinions, choices, preferences or needs on others and especially on their partners.

Abusers may also believe in rigid beliefs about male and female roles.

Some abusers express dislike and contempt for women and may explain their attachment to the particular woman by saying it is because she is different. Abusers often blame the failure of previous relationships on women, claiming their ex-partner was the abusive person.

Abusers rarely take responsibility for their actions and will minimize or blame external events for their actions, such as having a bad day, using drugs or alcohol, or being provoked by the abused woman.

In addition to these indicators, women may wish to examine whether they feel fearful of not complying or co-operating with abusers' wants or demands. Does she find that she is altering her behaviour, opinions or choices out of fear of negative consequences?

There are no checklists or guarantees that women can use to ensure being with a non-abusive partner. An equal relationship is one that is based on mutual respect, negotiation, shared responsibility, honesty and accountability.