

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA WILMINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES
COM 223
Mediation and Conflict Management

IS MY RELATIONSHIP ABUSIVE?

Most people are quick to respond, “No” when asked if they are in an abusive relationship. That is because most people define abuse as violence or some drastic behavior designed to intimidate or coerce them. Some abusive behavior appears polite or overly indulgent at first, but soon begins to feel as though you are being checked up on or controlled in one way or another. Frequently people will minimize incidents of emotional abuse and even make excuses for the abuser such as, “That’s the way he (or she) is. It’s sometimes annoying, but at least I know he (or she) cares.” See how many of the questions that follow can be answered, “Yes” when applied to your relationship.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE - Has your partner:

- * ignored your feelings?
 - * ridiculed or insulted women as a group?
 - * insulted your valued beliefs, religion, race, heritage, or class?
 - * withheld approval or affection as a punishment?
 - * criticized you by calling you names or shouting at you?
 - * insulted your family or friends?
 - * unreasonably accused you of having extramarital affairs or dating someone else?
 - * humiliated you in public or in front of friends or family?
 - * refused to socialize with you, but would not let you go alone to social functions?
 - * approved the purchase of your clothing or personal items?
 - * called your friends to check on your whereabouts?
 - * accompanied you on every shopping trip or errand?
 - * approved your participation in any clubs or activities?
 - * screened or limited your phone conversations?
 - * kept you from working, controlled your money, made all decisions on operations of the family or household?
 - * refused to work or to share money?
 - * taken car keys or money away?
 - * always driven you to and from work?
 - * required you to “*check in*” by phone?
 - * regularly threatened to leave you or told you to leave?
 - * threatened to hurt you or your family?
 - * called you frequently at work?
 - * punished the children when he (or she) was angry with you?
 - * threatened to kidnap the children if you left him (her)?
 - * abused pets to hurt you?
 - * followed you when you were not at home or work?
 - * manipulated you with lies and contradictions?
 - * told untrue stories to others about your “*faults*”?
 - * made surprise visits to your workplace?
 - * threatened to call your employer concerning your “*problems*”?
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PHYSICAL ABUSE - Has your partner:

- * pushed or shoved you?
- * held you to keep you from leaving, or locked you out?
- * slapped, bit, kicked, or choked you?
- * hit or punched you?
- * thrown objects at you
- * abandoned you in dangerous places?
- * refused to help when you were sick, injured, or pregnant?
- * subjected you to reckless driving or kept you from driving?
- * threatened or hurt you with a weapon?
- * forced you to have sex when you didn't want to, i.e. raped you?
- * forced sex after beating - assault and rape?

SEXUAL ABUSE - Has your partner:

- * treated or spoken of women as sex objects?
- * been jealously angry?
- * insisted you dress in a more sexual way than you wanted to?
- * minimized the importance of your feelings about sex?
- * criticized you sexually?
- * insisted on unwanted touching?
- * withheld sex and affection?
- * called you names like **whore** or **frigid**?
- * forced you to strip when you didn't want to?
- * publicly showed interest in other men or women?
- * had affairs with other men or women while promising to be faithful to you?
- * forced particular unwanted sex acts?
- * committed sadistic sexual acts?
- * coerced you to be seductive with other men or women?

Although some behaviors are clearly more dangerous than others, almost all of them are potentially dangerous. All show a lack of respect, as well as an effort to intimidate and control you. One problem with accepting a certain level of abuse is that there is a tendency for the abusive person to interpret your acceptance or toleration as permission to escalate the abuse into more and more dangerous and more frequent acts.

You are the only one who can decide how much is too much and what you are ready to do about it. It is important to recognize what is being done to you and to know that you do not have to accept it. It is also important to recognize that these behaviors or situations will not get better on their own even if the abuser promises that he or she will change. Look for behavioral change. Don't fall for the same old empty promises and persuasive arguments. Remember that part of the abuser's strategy is to say or do whatever it takes to maintain control of you. The abuser will work overtime to maintain the secrets and discourage any outside help or advice. If you are able to escape, remember that promises to change if you just come back home are really a technique to get you back under control, not a guarantee the abuse will stop.