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The Breakable Vow
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Profile of an Abusive Partner

- **Low self-esteem.** At the same time this person may appear cocky and boastful on occasion.
- **Trouble trusting others, particularly you.** In spite of this, they may say that they know you would never be unfaithful.
- **Jealous and possessive.** Initially, the abuser may say others were coming on to you. Eventually, thought, you will be accused of being attracted to other people, flirting, or being unfaithful.
- **Controlling.** Sometimes this can be subtle. You may be changing your behavior without realizing why. For example, you may "decide" not to see your friends too often because you don't want your partner

to get mad.

- **Usually comes from a family where there was violence, although they may deny this.**
- **Passionate!** This abusive relationship is intense and passionate. There is usually a Romeo and Juliet quality, which may be noticed by your friends. This intensity does NOT mean you are fated lovers. It means someone is holding to too tightly.
- **Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde personality.** The abuser can be loving and supportive one minute and cold and hostile, accusing or distant, the next.
- **Mood swings or explosive temper.** You think everything is going fine, and suddenly your partner is furious.
- **Macho or super masculine.** This is sometimes present in male abusers. This boyfriend will have strong opinions about how a man and woman should behave.
- **Rigid.** You may find yourself saying, "Well yes, this happened, but there are reasons why it happened." The abusive partner will not accept reasons or explanations. Everything is black or white.
- **Isolating.** These partners may want to isolate you from your friends or family. They may always want to be alone with you. Often they will start trouble between you and your best friend. They will be threatened by any relationships you have with members of the opposite sex and may attempt to destroy those friendships by criticizing your friends or pointing out ways in which they, your friends, have wronged you.
- **Emotionally and verbally abusive.** Sometimes there is no physical abuse until a commitment is made, i.e., you go steady, have sex, get pregnant, or cut off your friends and family. It could also be as simple as your agreement not to date others. You don't have to have bruises to be in an abusive relationship.
- **Denial.** This partner will attempt to minimize the violence or behavior by saying:
 - "I barely touched you."
 - "I was just messing around."
 - "You can't take a joke."
- **Blamer.** Abusive partners will blame others for their mistakes or problems. Again, it may be subtle. They will blame others for fights if they can saying any of the following:
 - "You make me crazy."
 - "You know what makes me mad and you do it anyway so it's your fault."
 - "If you weren't so beautiful, I wouldn't be so worried about losing you."
 - "Your friends are trying to break us up."
 - "That person was coming on to you."
- **When you have a fight, they may try to blame outside stressors saying the following:**
 - "My parents are making me crazy!"
 - "My teachers are making me crazy!"
 - "I feel like I'm under so much pressure."
 - "You don't understand me. Nobody does."

These are pressures and feelings with which we all must cope. They are not an excuse to be violent or abusive.
- **Alcohol or drug user.** This partner may abuse alcohol or drugs. If so, he or she has a built-in excuse. Remember that many people abuse alcohol and drugs and never become violent or abusive. If you are dating a substance abuser who is violent that person has two problems that need to be addressed, the substance abuse and the abuse. Look for statements like the following:
 - "I was totally wasted."
 - "I don't even remember this. Did I really do that?"
 - "I'll quit drinking."
 - "I'll quit drinking tequila, shots, whiskey, beer, whatever."
 - "I'll never do drugs again."
 - "I'm such a jerk! Why do you stay with me?"

They may also say things like:

- "Hey, you pushed me first."
- "What do you expect when you talk back to me?"
- "You were just as violent as me."
- "You started it, flirting with that other person."

This can get confusing for you. Don't let it. When you are in an abusive or dysfunctional relationship you may begin to act in ways you normally would not. That doesn't make it your fault. You have the right to talk to other people. You have the right to be angry in an argument and state your side without someone accusing you of "talking back."

Risk Assessment

Warning Signals

1. Does your partner call you names?
2. Does your partner say things that will hurt you, and then act angry if you get upset?
3. Does your partner tell you things your friends or family have said about you?
4. Would you describe him or her as more jealous or possessive than most people?
5. Does your partner get mad if you have a good time without him or her?
6. Does your partner talk about breaking up when you do something he or she doesn't like?
7. Does he or she sometimes mimic you or ignore you when you're talking?
8. Does your partner have sudden mood swings?

Abusive Behavior Low Risk

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions your partner may be **emotionally abusive**. Most abusive relationship begins with emotional abuse and escalates to physical abuse. If you don't feel you can break up, set some guidelines or boundaries and see how they react. Call them on the emotional abuse. For example, tell them you will not tolerate name calling. Then, the next time they call you a name, walk away. Let them know they owe you an apology. Remember, if they restrain you when you try to walk away, they are being physically abuse. Tell them so. If they threaten to break up with you because you demand respect, let them. It may be difficult to do, but if you do not set limits now, their behavior will get worse.

Danger Signs

1. Does your partner say they trust you but still accuse you of flirting or fooling around?
2. Does your partner check up on you? Does he or she surprise you by showing up somewhere you have said you will be?
3. Does your partner track your time? For example, does he or she ask where you were for an hour if it only takes twenty minutes to get home from somewhere?
4. Does your partner isolate you from your friends? Do they hate your best friend or say that your best friend has talked about you?
Does your partner get mad if you have a good time without him or her?
5. Has your partner pushed, shoved, slapped, kicked, or punched you? Have they grabbed you by the shoulders to "make you listen"?
6. When you defend yourself, does your partner say you are "talking back"?
7. Does your partner say he or she would not get so jealous if they did not love you so much? Do they say that you know what makes them mad and you do it anyway, so it is really your fault?
8. Do you apologize to others for your partner's actions? "They didn't mean it. You don't know them. They were just upset."

Abusive Behavior Medium Risk

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are in an abusive relationship.

It is not normal for someone to feel the need to check up on you. A classic sign of an abuser is dislike of the people closest to you. Typically, an abuser will try to separate you from your best friends by pointing out their faults. It starts with emotional abuse and moves to physical abuse. After a fight, during which they are abusive, abusers may become apologetic and contrite. They may be extremely loving and promise all kinds of things. At the same time, they may subtly blame you for the violence by saying you are making them jealous or that they love you so much they cannot help themselves.

If your partner is behaving like this, you need to get out. It will only get worse. Chances are your self-esteem has already been affected and you are beginning to feel badly about yourself. Being in an abusive relationship is confusing. You are never really sure if it is your fault or theirs. You may be thinking, "He or she has a point about some of their arguments." This may be true. You are probably not perfect. Nobody is. But often an abuser will take the truth and twist it so you do not know which way is up. You will find yourself trying harder and harder to please them and being less and less able to. This relationship could destroy you.

Red Alert Red Alert Red Alert

1. Has your partner become so jealous that you could describe him or her as paranoid?
2. Do you often find yourself trying to convince them that you did not do anything wrong?
3. Have they ever kept you somewhere against your will (car or house)?
4. Have they ever repeatedly commanded that you "tell the truth" even when you were not lying? Does your partner say you are sneaky and do you feel sometimes that you have to be sneaky to avoid fights or to see your friends?
5. Do they say they will die if you leave them or that they cannot live without you?
6. Have they ever talked about killing themselves?
7. Have they ever threatened to kill you?
8. Have they forced you to have sex when you did not want to?
9. Do you have to justify your actions, activities, and time with your friends?
10. Do you want to break up sometimes but feel afraid of what they might do? (hurt you, harm your family, tell others personal things about you?)

Abusive Behavior High Risk

If you answered yes to any of the questions above, you are in danger. Run for your life! Your partner is extremely abusive and could seriously hurt or even kill you. If your partner is behaving like this, it is no longer safe to date him or her. It is time to get help and end the relationship. You will never convince them that you are innocent of their accusations. Until you break up, that is. Then they will say they realize that you are the best thing that has ever happened to them and they are sorry. But that means nothing. As soon as you go back, it will all start again.

Many abusers threaten to kill themselves when you try to break up. Will they? Usually not, but your partner needs help and it must be professional help. YOU CANNOT HELP THIS PERSON. You must tell someone you trust. In cases of dating/domestic violence murder, the abuser often kills her and then kills himself. That is why it is so risky when your partner is suicidal. The most dangerous time for a female ending an abusive relationship is when she tries to leave. Check out Safety Planning and Break-Up Plans in the back of the novel, *The Breakable Vow*.

You need to show someone this risk assessment, your parents if you are a teen, and then call the nearest domestic violence hotline. They can advise you about protective orders and safety strategies. Do not minimize the danger in this situation. It could cost you your life!

If you feel you are in danger, contact your local dating/domestic violence shelter. To get the location of that organization you can call the [National Coalition Against Domestic Violence](#) at 1-800-799-SAFE.