

Patterns of Abuse

People who choose to abuse can come from any socio-economic status, occupation, race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual identity, age group, geographical location, or political persuasion.

How each survivor experiences abuse can vary greatly. Often, the abusive partner uses multiple tactics to gain power and control. Tactics may include emotional, verbal, psychological, physical, financial, sexual, reproductive control, stalking, discrediting, blaming, and pitting family and friends against each other.

The following list is not complete, but provides examples of common patterns that survivors often experience. People who abuse can utilize any of these tactics simultaneously or individually at any given time.

This document was adapted from **Bancroft, Lundy, "Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men", G.P. Putnam's Sons NY, NY 2002. (pgs 76-105).**

MSU SAFE PLACE 🌸 517-355-1100 🌸 NOABUSE@MSU.EDU 🌸 SAFEPLACE.MSU.EDU

MSU
Safe Place

The Demander

Abusive Partner's Attitude:

- *It's their partner's job to do things for them like taking care of their responsibilities. If they are unhappy about any aspect of their life, whether it has to do with the relationship or not, it is their partner's fault.*
- *Their partner should not place demands on them at all. Their partner should be grateful for whatever they choose to give.*
- *They believe they are very loving and giving. Their partner is lucky to have them.*

Abusive Partner's Actions:

- *They criticize their partner frequently, usually about things that they think their partner should have done - or done better.*
- *They have little sense of give and take. They demand emotional support, favors, caretaking, or sexual attention. They constantly feel like their partner owes them something.*
- *If their partner's needs conflict with their own, they are furious. They may call their partner self-centered or inflexible, twisting and changing reality (e.g., gaslighting).*

Effects On Their Partner:

- *They primarily focus on the abusive partner's needs.*
- *They take little time for themselves or their own needs.*
- *They feel on call and stressed.*
- *They feel depressed.*
- *They do not feel loved/respected.*

Always Right

Abusive Partner's Attitude:

- *They know better than their partner. Their intelligence is unquestionable.*
- *Their partner's opinions are not worth listening to or taking seriously.*
- *If their partner would accept that they know what is right, their relationship and everything else in their lives would go much better.*
- *If their partner disagrees, it is seen as disrespect and mistreatment.*
- *If they put their partner down enough, their partner will see the truth.*

Abusive Partner's Actions:

- *They speak with absolute certainty, brushing their partner's opinions aside.*
- *They have difficulty talking to their partner without condescension in their voice.*
- *During conflict, their arrogance gets even worse.*
- *They have all the answers to their partner's conflicts at work, home, in friendships, between family, how money is spent, how children are raised.*
- *They are knowledgeable about their partner's faults, and will tell their partner what is wrong with them and how to fix it.*

Effects On Their Partner:

- *They feel overwhelmed by the abusing partner's control, as if their every move is being watched under a microscope.*
- *They feel unsure, unimportant, and alone.*
- *They question their understanding and perception of reality.*
- *They question their own self-worth.*

MSU SAFE PLACE 🌸 517-355-1100 🌸 NOABUSE@MSU.EDU 🌸 SAFEPLACE.MSU.EDU

MSU
Safe Place

Role Reverser

Abusive Partner's Attitude:

- *Their partner is "crazy." Their partner gets uncontrollably upset over nothing.*
- *They can easily convince other people that their partner is the one who is abusive.*
- *As long as they stay calm, their partner can't call anything they do abusive, no matter how cruel or harmful.*
- *They know exactly how to get under their partner's skin.*

Abusive Partner's Actions:

- *They prove that anger does not cause abuse. They can assault their partner psychologically. They use calmness as a weapon to harm their partner.*
- *They are often smug and self-assured.*
- *They use sarcasm, mocking, mimicking, and cruel, cutting remarks during arguments.*
- *If their partner yells or cries, they deem their partner as the "abusive one."*

Effects On Their Partner:

- *They feel stupid, inferior, and/or guilty during arguments.*
- *During an argument, they may yell, leave the room, cry, or sink into silence.*
- *They blame themselves for their reactions.*
- *They feel they overact to their partner's behavior, and their partner "is not that bad."*
- *If they leave their abusing partner, they may experience delayed rage as they start to recognize how oppressive their partner was.*

The Player

Abusive Partner's Attitude:

- *Other people are put on earth to have sex – especially with them.*
- *People who want to have sex are 'easy' and people who refuse are too 'uptight.'*
- *It is not their fault other people find them irresistible. It is not fair to expect them to refuse temptations. It is all around them and they can't help it.*
- *They are in relationships that are convenient for them and when they feel like it.*
- *If their partner met their sexual needs, they wouldn't have to turn to other people.*

Abusive Partner's Actions:

- *They seem to be head over heels in love early in the relationship and want to spend as much time as possible with their partner, specifically in a sexual way.*
- *They lock their eyes hard on other people who walk by.*
- *They flirt with wait staff, clerks, or even their partner's friends.*
- *They say they have been hurt, or have a fear of commitment. They say they are just not ready, but the reality is they don't want restrictions on them.*

Effects On Their Partner:

- *They become isolated if the abusive partner flirts with people they care about.*
- *They feel shelved, especially during periods of time where the abusing partner is withdrawn or giving little to no attention to them.*
- *The abusing partner may turn violent if they are caught cheating.*

The Victim

Abusive Partner's Attitude:

- *They feel everyone has done them wrong, especially past partners.*
- *When accused of abuse, they feel their partner has "joined the others" who have been cruel and unfair to them.*
- *They feel justified in their actions if they are doing whatever they perceive their partner is doing to them.*
- *They believe they have had it hard, and are not responsible for their actions.*

Abusive Partner's Actions:

- *They say they have been burned by others from their past.*
- *They appeal to compassion, and the desire that their partner can be someone they always needed (unlike others).*
- *They only speak of their ex in degrading ways, and tell stories of abuse from former partner(s).*
- *The consequences of their actions are always framed as harm from another person, they have no sense of accountability.*

Effects On Their Partner:

- *If they leave, they feel guilty, despite mistreatment.*
- *They question if their actions are harmful to the abusing partner.*
- *They walk on eggshells, trying not to cause perceived harm to their partner.*
- *If they leave, they risk their abusing partner presenting themselves to the court as a victim of abuse in divorce and custody cases.*

The Dictator

Abusive Partner's Attitude:

- *Their partner has no right to defy or leave them. They control their partner's life.*
- *They would rather die than accept their partner's right to independence.*
- *The children are the best tool to keep their partner fearful.*
- *Seeing their partner terrified, upset, and/or hurt is exciting and satisfying.*

Abusive Partner's Actions:

- *They use ambiguous and threatening language to strike fear into their partner.*
- *They make threatening gestures to make their partner wonder what will happen next.*
- *They frequently remind their partner of the harm they can cause.*
- *They threaten to kill their partner often.*
- *They have a goal to paralyze their partner with fear so they don't leave or cheat.*
- *If their partner leaves, they may stalk and harass them.*

Effects On Their Partner:

- *They feel inadequate as a partner because they feel like they can't do anything right.*
- *They live in fear even after the relationship has ended.*
- *It may be difficult to think clearly, which is often framed by the abusing partner as them being "crazy" or "unstable."*

The Sensitive One

Abusive Partner's Attitude:

- *They appear to reject stereotypes surrounding toxic masculinity, so they can't be abusive.*
- *They use a lot of "psychobabble" to avoid accusations of mistreatment.*
- *They control their partner by analyzing their partner. They get inside their partner's head whether they want them there or not.*
- *Nothing in the world is more important than their feelings.*

Abusive Partner's Actions:

- *They love openly sharing their feelings, insecurities, fears, and emotional injuries.*
- *Often they have participated in therapy, or 12-step programs.*
- *They often use terms like developing closeness, working out issues.*
- *They claim their partner is constantly hurting their feelings, but is unsure why.*
- *They want their partner to grovel if they feel their partner hurt their feelings.*
- *After abusive episodes, they tie their actions to feelings of anger to avoid accountability.*

Effects On Their Partner:

- *They get burdened with feelings of guilt.*
- *They may respond defensively due to the abusing partner always blaming them for their hurt feelings.*

Reputation Wrecker

Abusive Partner's Attitude:

- *They believe that they are better than their partner in every way possible and others should know about all of their partner's problems.*
- *They think that their partner's struggles should be used against them, and make them unworthy of love, respect, and relationships with others.*
- *They believe that threatening their partner's reputation is the best way to get them to change in their favor.*

Abusive Partner's Actions:

- *They talk badly about their partner especially to shared friends, and family.*
- *They will try to discredit their partner's ability to care for themselves or their children by bringing up their (alleged) struggles with substance abuse or mental health challenges.*
- *They will use systems like law enforcement, family court, and CPS to harm their partner.*
- *They threaten to ruin their partner's reputation if they leave them.*

Effects On Their Partner:

- *They feel extremely guilty, and blame themselves for personal struggles such as substance abuse or their mental health.*
- *They fear systems like law enforcement, CPS, and family court due the abusing partner using these systems to punish them for ending the relationship.*
- *They are constantly worried about what people think about them, and their reputation.*