

Am I In an Emotionally Abusive Relationship?

Emotional abuse is notoriously difficult to detect, even for those inside of the relationship. While physical abuse leaves bruises and scars that everyone can see, emotional abuse causes emotional and psychological damage that gradually worsens over time, making it much harder to spot.

There are a few clear indications of emotional abuse, however. If you suspect that you're in an emotionally abusive relationship, keep reading; we've prepared a brief guide to help you determine whether or not you're the victim of emotional abuse.



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Signs Of an Emotionally Abusive Relationship

When an emotional abuser first forms a new relationship, their behavior will likely be exceedingly charming. The actual abuse doesn't usually begin until the relationship is relatively well established because an abuser wants their victim to be invested in the relationship before they reveal their true self; that way, the victim is less likely to leave once the abuse begins.

Signs to Look for in Your Partner

Once a relationship has moved past the introductory phase, signs of emotional abuse will start to appear. Here are some of the signs to look for in your partner's behavior that could indicate you're in an emotionally abusive relationship:

1. Your partner criticizes you

If you find yourself being routinely criticized by your partner, you might be the victim of emotional abuse. Criticizing someone is a way to demean them and make them feel inferior. The criticism could be regarding practically anything, from the way you talk, cook, clean, dress, or sing to your job, friends, family, hobbies, or beliefs. The topic itself isn't important; all that matters to the abuser is that you're made to feel as if you're unworthy.

2. Your partner calls you names

Name calling is another indicator of emotional abuse. The names could be clearly insulting, such as "stupid," "loser," or "moron" plus even more offensive expletive-filled terms that we won't mention here. But name calling could be much more subtle than that. People who use derogatory pet names like "my chubby love" or "my adorable dimwit" are belittling their partner, especially if they continue using the name after they've been asked to stop.

3. Your partner makes jokes at your expense

Does your partner ever make a cruel remark then act like it was said in jest? An example of this might be if they say "That haircut makes you look even worse than normal" then insist that they were just kidding when you get offended. Making "jokes" and using sarcasm in this way is a tactic used to demean someone else and is a sign of emotional abuse.

4. Your partner embarrasses you in public

Another way that emotional abusers humiliate their victims is by embarrassing them in public. This type of behavior allows the abuser to feel in control and superior to their partner. An example of this would be if you and your partner are at a family dinner and your partner tells an embarrassing story that you'd rather keep private, this could be a sign of emotional abuse.

5. Your partner talks down to you

The end goal of emotional abuse is to make the other person feel insignificant, which gives the abuser a feeling of control. One way this can be achieved is by talking down to the other person and lecturing them. If you have a partner who is condescending and treats you like you're a child who's incapable of doing things for themselves, then you might be in an emotionally abusive relationship.

6. Your partner blames you for everything

Do you ever feel like you can't do anything right? Does your partner blame you whenever anything goes wrong, whether you were involved or not? This type of behavior is typical for those involved in an emotionally abusive relationship. An example of this would be your if partner blames you for the dog getting loose when they were the one who left the gate unlocked. The inability to accept responsibility while shifting blame to another are signs of emotional abuse.

7. Your partner downplays your accomplishments

In a healthy relationship, partners are proud of each other's accomplishments. Unfortunately, that's not typically the case in an emotionally abusive relationship. Instead of cheering their partner on and praising them for what they've achieved, an abuser will act like it's not a big deal. For example, if you get a new position at work earning \$3.00 more per hour, an abusive partner might tell you it's not that much money and you should have asked for more instead of congratulating you on the job promotion.

8. Your partner manipulates you to get what they want

Manipulating someone to get what you want from them is a type of emotional blackmail. Let's say for example that you're scheduled to have dinner with a friend, but your partner doesn't want you to go. To get you to comply, your partner might partner refuse to communicate with you or withhold affection until you agree to cancel your plans.

9. Your partner isolates you

Does your partner seem reluctant to let you spend time with friends and family? Do they try to get you to stay home with them instead of spending time with others? If so, this is another indication that you may be in an emotionally abusive relationship.

10. Your partner checks in on you constantly

How many times per day does your partner check in on you? While it's perfectly normal for people in a relationship to check up on one another, it could be part of a bigger problem if your partner texts or calls you incessantly. In this case, your partner is attempting to assert control over you, which is a sign of abuse.

Signs to Look for in Yourself

You can also look at your own behavior and how it has changed since your relationship first began to determine if you're in an emotionally abusive relationship. Here are a few key signs to look for:

1. You're confused by your partner's change in behavior

Has your partner's behavior changed significantly since your relationship began? Were they once charming and thoughtful but now they seem to put you down a lot, leaving you confused by their behavior? If you're wondering what happened to the amazing person you first got involved with, this could be a symptom or a larger problem: emotional abuse.

2. You're less confident than you used to be

Emotional abuse is designed to denigrate the other person and wear down their self-esteem. Over time, this can have a serious effect on the victim's self-confidence. If you find yourself feeling unsure of yourself and less confident that you used to be, you might want to take a look at the relationships in your life and examine whether or not you're being emotionally abused.

3. You worry about upsetting people – especially your partner

The lack of self-confidence also expresses itself as uncertainty and hypersensitivity. In other words, you feel like you're walking on eggshells, that you have to be very careful about what you say or do so that you don't trigger your partner.

4. You blame yourself for everything

Do you ever feel like you can't do anything right and that you're responsible for all the problems in your relationship? In most relationships, both people contribute to its difficulties, but if your partner repeatedly blames you when things go wrong, you might start to internalize that belief.

5. You apologize a lot

When you and your partner have disagreements, do you both end up apologizing or are you the only one who says they're sorry? As a result of accepting blame whenever things go wrong, you might find yourself constantly apologizing to other people, especially your partner, even when you're not at fault.

6. You feel more anxious and fearful than you used to

How has your mental health changed since getting into a relationship with your partner? Is life better than it used to be or have you been struggling with fear, anxiety, and depression? If you find yourself crying more than you used to and feeling powerless to change things, you could be experiencing emotional abuse.

7. You're reluctant to talk about your relationship

What do you do when your friends ask about your partner and want to know how the relationship is going? Do you happily share your experiences or are you unwilling to talk about your relationship? Those who are in healthy relationships are usually eager to talk about their partner while people who experience emotional abuse may feel ashamed about it and change the subject whenever it's raised.

How to Leave an Emotionally Abusive Relationship

Leaving your partner might not be easy, but it is essential if you ever want to recover from the damage they've inflicted. Here are a few tips to help you extract yourself from an emotionally abusive relationship.

Don't expect your partner to change: While you may be tempted to try and change your partner, these efforts will likely be fruitless. The person you saw in the beginning of the relationship was an act; the emotional abuser is who they truly are. In order to move on from the relationship, you need to accept that fact.

Recognize the cycle of emotional abuse: One reason you may hold out hope for change is because your relationship sometimes seems to be working well; that's all a part of the cycle of abuse. After abusive incidents occur, the next phase is reconciliation followed by a period of calm. You may actually enjoy the relationship during this part of the cycle, but it never lasts for long. Tension starts to build over time resulting in another abusive episode, and the cycle continues.

Put your needs first: In order to successfully leave the relationship, you need to learn how to put your needs first. You're probably accustomed to taking care of others (namely your partner) and you might even feel obligated to try and "save" your partner, but this inclination is misguided; your partner is responsible for their own life - you can only save yourself.

Set clear boundaries: It's important to set boundaries so the abuser knows you'll no longer accept their behavior. For example, if your partner calls you names or criticizes something you've done, tell them clearly and calmly if they do that again, you're walking away or leaving the house. Then make sure to follow up and do exactly what you promised.

Seek support from family and friends: Let the important people in your life know what's going on. Though your relationships might have suffered because the abuser attempted to isolate you, those who truly care should still be available to support you as you leave the relationship.

Get professional help: You're going to feel a bunch of conflicting emotions as you leave the abusive relationship; you may even question whether or not you're making the right decision. The best way to clarify your thinking and move forward is to find professional help. You can easily find a qualified therapist through a referral from your primary care physician, an online therapy provider, or your insurance company.

Create a plan then take action: With the support of your family, friends, and therapist, make a plan to get out of the relationship and cut ties with your abuser. Plans might include finding a place to live, getting a divorce lawyer, changing your phone number, opening a new bank account, gathering important documents, and updating online passwords.

To make sure that you've covered all your bases, work with your therapist and loved ones to create a detailed and workable plan. Once your plan is in place, take action and don't look back. Then, and only then, can you start the process of healing from emotional abuse and creating an entirely new – and much healthier - life.