

Warning Signs: Is It Physical Abuse?



Dating abuse encompasses many types of abuse, including physical, emotional, verbal, digital and sexual. The warning signs of physical abuse may not be as obvious as someone might think. Because relationships exist on a spectrum, it can be hard to tell when a behavior crosses the line from healthy to unhealthy or abusive. Dating violence is a pattern, so be aware of these early warning signs and what could become a series of abusive behaviors over time.

Explosive Temper: Many people can anger quickly, but this kind of temper should stand out because it is so volatile and unpredictable. One minute, they could be joking around and laughing, and the next they could be screaming in someone's face.

Intimidation: Does one partner make the other one feel afraid, even with a look or gesture? Do they smash things or destroy property? Do they threaten to hurt their partner? Are they abusing pets, like kicking the dog when it barks? Do they like to show off their weapons? These are all examples of intimidation being used to keep the victim "in line" and show them who's "in charge" of the relationship. In a healthy relationship, neither partner feels afraid of the other.

Mood Swings: It's normal to feel the full range of emotions over time. Sometimes you feel angry, happy and sad all in one day. But potential abusers exhibit rapid mood swings to the point where they feel like a different person. This is sometimes referred to as the "Dr. Jekyll / Mr. Hyde" phenomenon, where the abuser acts one way one minute and totally different the next.

Aggression: Dates don't usually end with a punch, but that kind of abusive behavior can develop over time. Acts of aggression towards children or animals are a major red flag, but other forms of aggression may be more subtle. This could include a severe lack of patience, throwing a fit or using "playful force" during sexual acts.

Physically Hurting: This may seem obvious, but oftentimes physical abuse is not seen as such unless it's extreme. Even if the incidents of physical abuse seem minor compared to other stories, it's still abuse. There are no "better" or "worse" forms of abuse. If someone is pushed or their arm is pulled, it's still physical pain. Even if it's only happened once or twice, studies show that if a partner intentionally injures their significant other once, they're likely to continue to do so.

If you think you know someone who needs help in an abusive relationship, let them know the TIX Office works with CAC PD as well as local law enforcement throughout the state of Arizona.