

WARNING SIGNS OF AN ABUSER

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Woman starts to question boyfriend's protectiveness

DEAR ABBY: My boyfriend, "Josh," won't leave me alone. We have been living together for almost a year, and he is the ultimate overprotector. When I start to leave the house to run errands or anything, he stops me and asks, "Where do you think you're going?" When I tell him, he will then follow me to the location. I love Josh and would never want to hurt his feelings, but I think he's a little too worried about me. I'm an adult, and I can take care of myself. Is Josh being too overprotective, or am I just crazy? --OVERPROTECTED IN OREGON

DEAR OVERPROTECTED: You're not crazy. Josh's behavior is over the top and is less about your safety than his own insecurity and lack of trust. Every year or so, I print the warning signs of an abuser. Please review them carefully. **If any of the signs in addition to No. 3 apply to you, you should end the relationship immediately. Read on:**

1. PUSHES FOR QUICK INVOLVEMENT: Comes on strong, claiming, "I've never felt loved like this by anyone." An abuser pressures the new partner for an exclusive commitment almost immediately.
2. JEALOUS: Excessively possessive; calls constantly or visits unexpectedly; prevents you from going to work because "you might meet someone"; checks the mileage on your car.
3. CONTROLLING: Interrogates you intensely (especially if you're late) about whom you talked to and where you were; keeps all the money; insists you ask permission to go anywhere or do anything.
4. UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS: Expects you to be the perfect mate and meet his or her every need.

5. ISOLATION: Tries to cut you off from family and friends; accuses people who are your supporters of “causing trouble.” The abuser may deprive you of a phone or car or try to prevent you from holding a job.

6. BLAMES OTHERS FOR PROBLEMS AND MISTAKES: It's always someone else's fault if something goes wrong.

7. MAKES OTHERS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS OR HER

FEELINGS: The abuser says, “You make me angry,” instead of, “I am angry,” or says, “You're hurting me by not doing what I tell you.”

8. HYPERSENSITIVITY: Is easily insulted, claiming hurt feelings when he or she is really mad. Rants about the injustice of things that are just a part of life.

9. CRUELTY TO ANIMALS OR CHILDREN: Kills or punishes animals brutally. Also may expect children to do things that are far beyond their ability (Whips a 3-year-old for wetting a diaper) or may tease them until they cry. Sixty-five percent of abusers who beat their partner will also abuse children.

10. “PLAYFUL” USE OF FORCE DURING SEX: Enjoys throwing you down or holding you down against your will during sex; finds the idea of rape exciting.

11. VERBAL ABUSE: Constantly criticizes or says blatantly cruel things; degrades, curses, calls you ugly names. This may also

involve sleep deprivation, waking you up with relentless verbal abuse.

12. RIGID GENDER ROLES: Expects you to serve, obey, remain at home.

13. SUDDEN MOOD SWINGS: Switches from sweet to violent in a matter of minutes.

14. PAST BATTERING: Admits to hitting a mate in the past, but says the person made him (or her) do it.

15. THREATS OF VIOLENCE: Says things like, "I'll break your neck," or "I'll kill you," and then dismisses them with, "Everybody talks that way," or "I didn't really mean it."