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RAP

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Dangerous Relationships: Warning Signs You Need to Know

Is this the right person for me? Relationships during residency can be difficult to form, and hard to maintain. A healthy intimate relationship can help you stay balanced and emotionally supported during stressful times. An unhealthy relationship that involves emotional or physical abuse will do just the opposite.

Mutual trust, honesty and respect are all a part of a healthy intimate relationship. Yet no one is perfect, and sometimes we overlook the first indicators that a relationship could turn abusive or violent.

Spotting the clues

In his book "Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men," leading abuse expert Lundy Bancroft explores the



"...you don't have to wait for someone to treat you bad repeatedly. All it takes is once, and if they get away with it that once, if they know they can treat you like that, then it sets the pattern for the future."

- Jane Green, *Bookends*

early warning signs of a potentially abusive relationship. Among the tip-offs are disrespect toward you or former partners, self-centeredness, controlling or possessive behavior, and unwillingness to admit fault. Bancroft's book offers insights on nine different types of abusers and the dangers each may present.

"The best predictor of future violence is past violence," says clinical psychologist Eve Kilmer, Ph.D. She provides couples therapy as part of her work with a variety of clients in her private Boulder, Colorado practice. "You can find out a lot about someone online," she says. "If you learn that someone has had a restraining order filed against them, for example, that's a huge clue."

Another warning sign is that someone seems too good to be true, says Kilmer. "Often an abuser puts on a façade. They pretend to be what they need to be in order to 'hook' you. They may move the relationship too fast, and try to get your commitment quickly, because it's a lot of work keeping up a façade."

In a normal, healthy relationship, by contrast, both individuals will take it slow, and allow time to evaluate one another before making a serious commitment.

Personality disorders

Certain personality disorders are linked to emotional or physical

The healthiest relationships are built on mutual trust and respect. That includes respect for boundaries. When an intimate relationship becomes abusive, violent or makes us feel threatened, it's time to make a change. That may mean getting out, getting help, or both. Your Resident Assistance Program is a confidential and caring resource for even the most difficult relationship issues. Available around the clock, RAP professionals will listen to your concerns and help you navigate difficult relationships as well as other challenges you may face during your residency.

Contact RAP: 813-870-3344

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abuse in a relationship. Among these are borderline personality disorder (BPD) and narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

Individuals with BPD tend to have difficulty forming and keeping stable relationships. The personality type is characterized by mood swings, impulsivity and highly emotional or aggressive behavior.

"Those who suffer from BPD or strong borderline tendencies most often become emotionally abusive due to their tendency to project or transfer their own feelings, behaviors, or perceived traits onto others," writes Beverly Engel in "The Emotionally Abusive Relationship."

Narcissism is another trait to watch for. While not all narcissists

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Intimate Partner Violence Defined

Intimate partner violence (IPV) occurs between two people in a close relationship. "Intimate partner" includes current and former spouses and dating partners. IPV exists along a continuum from a single episode of violence to ongoing battering.

IPV includes four types of behavior:

Physical violence is when a person hurts or tries to hurt a partner by hitting, kicking, or using another type of physical force.

Sexual violence is forcing a partner to take part in a sex act when the partner does not consent.

Threats of physical or sexual violence include the use of words, gestures, weapons, or other means to communicate the intent to cause harm.

Emotional abuse is threatening a partner or his or her possessions or loved ones, or harming a partner's sense of self-worth. Examples are stalking, name-calling, intimidation, or not letting a partner see friends and family.

Often, IPV starts with emotional abuse. This behavior can progress to physical or sexual assault. Several types of IPV may occur together.

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention>

RAP professionals are highly trained to help with domestic violence situations. Make RAP your first call: **813-870-3344**

Your Resident Assistance Program

The RAP newsletter is provided as a benefit to medical residents at the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine and their dependents.

We welcome your comments on newsletter topics, however, we cannot provide RAP services by email.

Gary L. Wood & Associates, P.A.
4700 N. Habana Avenue Suite 300
Tampa, FL 33614
RAP Helpline: 813-870-3344
www.woodassociates.net

Editor

Patricia N. Alexander, Ph.D.
PAlexander@woodassociates.net

Writer

Susan H. Burnell, APR
SusanBurnellAPR@gmail.com

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are abusers, the typical abuser often has narcissistic issues. "A narcissist may start out being very empathetic toward you, but may show a lack of empathy for others," says Kilmer. "They can charm, but they also need to control and manipulate."

A narcissist may be supercritical of an ex, or nasty to the help at a restaurant, Kilmer notes. "It's all about them, and their need to be superior at others' expense."

Women in the caretaking professions can be prime targets for a narcissist, says Kilmer. "The narcissist sees someone who is a people-pleaser as the perfect match—they want someone who will take care of their needs. They can be wonderful until you bring up a complaint, and then they respond with an explosive reaction."

Healthy Boundaries are Essential

Setting boundaries and expectations early in a relationship can help keep you from getting involved with the wrong person. It's important to be clear about what behaviors and attitudes you will not tolerate. If you have any concerns at all about whether the relationship is a good fit, ask questions you wouldn't otherwise ask, and stand your ground early on.

A client of Kilmer's did just that when she began dating a surgeon. "The surgeon showed up more than half hour late for their first date, putting on a charming front," Kilmer recounts. "Normally my client would have said, 'no problem,' but instead, she took a risk. She told him how long she'd been waiting and said, 'You have a cell phone. You could have called. I felt unimportant when you didn't call.' The surgeon's response was 'Don't take it personally. I do this to everyone.' That exchange flushed out his lack of empathy right at the outset, and she never went out with him again."

Editor's note: This article is part one of a two-part series. The September 2013 issue of the RAP newsletter will offer tips for breaking out of a pattern of unhealthy or abusive relationships.

Sources cited

Bancroft, L., (2002). *Why Does He Do That? Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Engel, B., (2002). *The Emotionally Abusive Relationship: How to Stop Being Abused and How to Stop Abusing*. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons.

Resources

RAP counselors are experienced in dealing with the unique challenges of residency including situations of intimate partner violence and abuse. If you feel threatened in a relationship, and fear that a partner may be monitoring your calls, it is safe to call the RAP any time: **813-870-3344**

The Verbally Abusive Relationship: How to recognize it and how to respond, by Patricia Evans, Adams Media Corporation, Avon, Mass. (1996)

CDC Podcasts on Injury and Violence Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/socialmedia/podcast.html>