

# HELPS Newsletter

Health Enhancement for Lifelong Professional Students at USF Health

August 2014

## How Healthy is This Relationship? Signs That Someone's Not Right for You

Is this the right person for me? Why does she keep doing that? What makes him say that? Where did *that* reaction come from?

On top of everything else you have to do, if you're questioning a close relationship, it may not be the healthiest one for you.

When you're focused on getting through your degree or professional program, relationships 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.

### Spotting the clues

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.

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

expert Lundy Bancroft explores the 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 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 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."

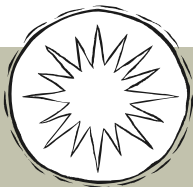
Women in the caretaking professions can be prime targets for a narcissist, says Kilmer. "The narcissist sees someone who is a people-pleaser as the perfect match—they want someone who will take care of their needs. They can be wonderful until you bring up a complaint, and then they respond with an explosive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

### Healthy Boundaries

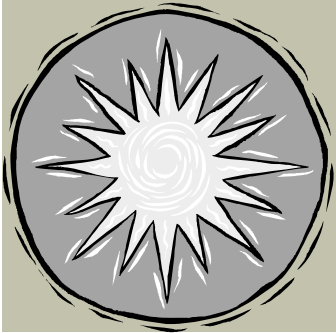
Setting boundaries and expectations early in a relationship

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**We want you to thrive, not just survive, at USF**



You don't have to go it alone as you pursue your degree. The Health Enhancement for Lifelong Professional Students program can assist when you're not sure where to turn. HELPS is available for you 24/7: **813-870-0184**



**HELPS 24-hour  
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## How Healthy is This Relationship?

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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."

### Warning signs of dangerous relationships

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>

### Online Resources for Smart Consumers

Formed in 2011, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) offers an online system to collect consumer complaints. To date, the bureau has handled over 400,000 complaints in multiple languages about credit cards, mortgages, bank accounts and services, student loans, credit reporting, money transfers, debt collection, payday loans, vehicle and other consumer loans – and most recently, prepaid cards.

In many cases, the CFPB is able to get people some relief – in the form of refunds, credit report corrections or putting an end to harassing phone calls by debt collectors.

The bureau also offers many other consumer resources, including:

- [Ask CFPB, a database with answers to more than 1000 common financial questions](#)
- [Know Before You Owe, a campaign to make costs and risks of products clearer](#)
- [Student loan resources for students, families, and high school and college staff](#)
- [Managing money guides for caregivers of older Americans](#)
- [Financial education guides on a wide range of consumer products and services](#)

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