

Warning Signs of Possible Future Abuse

Professor Rebecca Harris

The following are common themes that were present in relationships that ended with physical violence or even murder. Gavin deBecker's *The Gift of Fear* is the source for the majority of them, but experience and research have led me to add more to the list.

Please keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list, and that these all exist within a larger context (i.e., being sullen or moody all by itself is not a warning sign, nor is having guns or weapons). As Gavin deBecker will tell you, if you intuitively feel you are in danger, the time to seek help is now, not later. These things do not resolve themselves. It won't get better the longer you are in the relationship. And, above all, please remember:

Don't stay in a relationship because you are scared of what might happen if you leave.

Leave a relationship because you are scared of what will happen if you stay.

-Prof. Rebecca Harris

Warning signs of possible future abuse:

1. Accelerates the pace of the relationship (i.e., declares love and/or proposes marriage very quickly)
2. Is verbally abusive
3. Resolves conflict with intimidation, bullying, or violence
4. Becomes **jealous** of anyone or anything that takes time away from the relationship, including family or close friends
5. Uses threats to control; includes threats to restrict freedom
6. Says things like, "If you ever leave me..." followed by a threat to defame or embarrass you or general statements implying "You'll regret it"
7. Speaks about people from past relationships in vicious or derogatory or sexist ways (including name-calling and/or descriptions of revenge.)
8. Breaks or strikes things in anger, uses **symbolic** violence (hurts your pet, punches walls, throws things)
9. Keeps a "tight leash" and requires an account of your time, including demanding to look through your phone or know your passwords, or doing such things secretly
10. Has surveilled or followed you, in person or online/using social media

11. Uses money to control
12. Uses drugs or alcohol as an excuse for behavior
13. Refuses to accept rejection
14. Uses phrases like “together for life” “always” or “no matter what”
15. Projects **extreme** emotions onto others even when there is no evidence that would lead a reasonable person to perceive them
16. Minimizes incidents of abuse
17. Spends a disproportionate amount of time talking about partner
18. Derives **identity** from the relationship
19. Tries to enlist your friends or relatives in a campaign to keep or recover the relationship
20. Resists change and is described as inflexible, unwilling to compromise
21. Identifies with violent people in film or history; justifies violence
22. Suffers mood swings/is angry, sullen, depressed
23. Blames others for everything; refuses to take responsibility
24. Weapons are hugely important; has gun/s; talks about or jokes about and/or collects weapons